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I am the bread of life: he that cometh
to me, shall not hunger; and he that
believeth in me shall never thirst.

John VI. 35.

K. Boullé de la Bouillérie (727)

HOURS AT THE ALTAR;

OR

MEDITATIONS ON THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

M. L'ABBÉ DE LA BOUILLERIE,

VICAR-GENERAL OF PARIS.

Edited by

EDWARD CASWALL,

PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

"Could you not watch with me one hour?"

Third Edition.

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PREFACE.



THE Meditations here presented, under a somewhat altered title, to the English reader,* have been received with such extraordinary favour in France, that a few words upon them, and more especially upon the grand devotional movement in the French metropolis, with which they have been so intimately associated, may not seem altogether out of place.

About ten years since M. l'Abbé de la Bouillerie, with that loving inventiveness of which Holy Church has supplied so many examples in these later times, set

* *Méditations sur l'Eucharistie*, par M. l'Abbé de la Bouillerie, Vicaire-Général de Paris. Sagnier et Bray, Editeurs. Paris.

on foot in Paris an Association dedicated to the special object of adoring the Blessed Sacrament during the night. Its members, distinguished as "the Associates of the Nocturnal Adoration", engaged themselves to consecrate one hour of the night monthly to this devout exercise, which they carried on, each apart, in the solitude of his own chamber; presenting themselves in spirit, though not in person, before the most Holy Sacrament, by an act analogous to that of spiritual communion. The period of Adoration extended from eight in the evening to eight in the morning, each Associate commencing an hour later every month, so that, by the end of the twelve-month, he had adored during all the twelve hours of the night.

This, however, was far from completing the holy design of our zealous Abbé. His

ardent desire was to pave the way, by means of this Association, for a greater work—the Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris in the form of the Quarant' Ore.

As a further step in this direction, he succeeded, with the gradual increase of his Association, in obtaining an Exposition of one day monthly in thirty churches of the metropolis; and at length, on the elevation of Mgr. Sibour to the See of Paris, he had the happiness of beholding his efforts crowned with success; the establishment of the Perpetual Adoration being among the first acts of the new Archbishop.

Of this devotion, so glorious to Paris, the Association of the Nocturnal Adoration, as it has been the germ, is still the life and main support. A numerous body

of Associates successively maintains the nightly watch before the Blessed Sacrament at the various churches where the Exposition is being held, and this, too, without detriment to the more private devotional exercise which constituted their original bond of union.

One admirable work of this Society must not be passed over. From its very commencement its pious founder has been in the habit of bringing before his Associates the necessities of poor churches in rural districts, ill provided with requisites for the becoming celebration of the holy mysteries. Here again there has been a progress exceeding all expectation, the Association having distributed, in the year before last, the large sum of nearly twenty thousand francs in articles of sacred use and ornament for the altar.

In connection with the devotional movement thus briefly narrated, the Meditations here presented to the reader may be viewed at once as an effect and a cause. If, on the one hand, they have grown out of it, on the other, whether regarded in their fervid extemporaneous delivery, or in their subsequent publication, they have had no slight influence in kindling and maintaining, amidst a perpetual series of unsurpassed political excitements, the peculiar spirit so necessary to its success: and it has been their author's rare privilege to know that they have been blessed beyond his utmost hopes to many and many a soul. In the course of a very few years they have seen twelve editions; and thus popular in their own country, the time was surely come when they could no longer be withheld from the

large body of Catholics who speak the English tongue.

The Editor cannot allow himself to conclude these brief remarks without thanking the accomplished lady* to whom he owes his first introduction to the work, and who has had so large a share in its translation.

EDGBASTON,

Feast of the Epiphany, 1855.

* Miss Dorothea Smith.

TO THE ASSOCIATES
OF
THE NOCTURNAL ADORATION
OF THE
MOST HOLY SACRAMENT.



ORIGINAL DEDICATION OF THE AUTHOR.



To you, my dear Associates, I dedicate this little book; and for the very best of reasons.

In the first place, these Meditations belong to you in their very origin, being, in a changed form, the identical instructions delivered by me at those monthly assemblies, of which we all cherish so pleasing a remembrance. Then again, if I now venture to reproduce, in a permanent shape, indeliberate effusions, consigned originally

to the simple custody of your hearts, your urgent solicitations are the cause: and so, too, it is to the faithful notes with which several of you have furnished me, that I owe my ability to satisfy your devout desires. Need I add that, as these Meditations were originally delivered for your sake, so it is for yourselves, in the first instance, that I now commit them to print?

In putting together these thoughts on the Blessed Eucharist, I have had a two-fold aim. On the one hand, I wished to supply you with twelve subjects of meditation for those twelve hours of the night, which you consecrate yearly to the adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament; on the other, I wished to make you familiar with a mode of meditation on this sweetest of mysteries, rich, as it appears to me, in spiritual fruit. You cannot fail of re-

marking that the texts from Holy Scripture, which I have placed at the head of each Meditation, have, for the most part, but an indirect connection with the Holy Eucharist. Nevertheless, having my mind replete and charged, so to say, with this divine mystery, I have found no difficulty in bringing these apparently remote texts to bear upon it. I could wish that you too, my dear Associates, would endeavour to form a similar habit of detecting the Holy Eucharist in all your spiritual reading, and especially in the pages of Holy Scripture. I could wish that the Sacrament of love preoccupied the very entrance of your mind and of your heart, claiming a share in all your thoughts, in all your best and tenderest affections.

Whilst, however, I dedicate to you these Meditations, it is far from my wish

to imply that they are suitable. for none but yourselves. On the contrary, I offer them as a tribute of love to all devout souls, wherever to be found—to all who have tasted how sweet the Lord is in the Sacrament of the Altar. Loving the Eucharist as they do, they will love also, I doubt not, this little volume, since they will find in it the same thoughts and feelings with which God has often inspired, and oh, how far better ! their own hearts.

It is too true, the book, now that it is finished, is far from satisfying me. Would that, in endeavouring to express the sweetness of the Eucharist, I could have borrowed the pen of that great Doctor* whose eloquence the Church compares to honey, and whose writings I have often

* St. Bernard.

read to you with delight! Alas! that I have only been able to follow him at an interval far behind, when I would have wished to run in the odour of his perfumes! Nevertheless, I shall esteem myself only too happy, if these Meditations shall succeed in furnishing you with a single additional motive of love towards our Lord in His Holy Sacrament; and if at the hour of your nocturnal adorations they shall serve as the feeble lamps suspended in front of our sanctuaries, which suffice to guide our steps to the Tabernacle, but diminish not its mysterious obscurity;—lending an aid to your prayer, without disturbing its recollection and repose!

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HOURS AT THE ALTAR.



First Meditation.

THE SLEEP OF JESUS.

Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat.
I sleep and my heart is watching.
CANT., V. 2.

I.

SUCH is the sweet language in which the Bridegroom of the holy Canticles addresses us; let us hearken to his soothing words; let us try to understand them well:—

“I sleep”, he says, “and my heart is watching”. Ah! had Jesus simply said, “I sleep”, and no more, His words, far from giving me that delight which they now convey, would but have created inquietude and alarm. Jesus sleeps! and the devil, my enemy, is awake, and going about like a lion ready to devour me!

Jesus sleeps! and my senses, ever on the watch, are brooding over my soul in order to enslave it! Jesus sleeps! who, then, will keep guard over me? My beloved sleeps! in whom, then, shall I confide? My strength sleeps? who will sustain me? My hope sleeps! in whom shall I hope?

But He who is at once my love, my hope, and my strength, does not leave me long in suspense. "I sleep", he says, "but my heart is watching". O words of sweet encouragement! That sleep, which leaves the heart awake, is not a torpid, inert sleep; that sleep in which the heart sleeps not, is not a sleep of forgetfulness. The heart of Jesus is watching! He can then still love me. The heart of Jesus is watching! He can then still aid me. That sacred heart will never want secret words wherewith to instruct me, nor secret delights wherewith to charm me. What matters it if all within Him sleep, provided his heart be watch-

ing! His heart, is it not most especially Himself? . . . Sleep, Lord Jesus, I am comforted; thy heart is watching!

II.

- But let us now endeavour to penetrate the mystery contained in the apparently contradictory expression, "I sleep, but my heart is watching"; let us inquire how it is that the Bridegroom sleeps, while his heart sleeps not.

Think upon the divine Word hidden in the bosom of the Father, before the creation of worlds! There He dwells, and has dwelt from all eternity! and what does He there? "He sleeps", suggests intruding reason, "with an eternal sleep". Or at least as regards this world, which is not yet created; as regards man, still non-existent, He seems to slumber! Later on, indeed, He will leave the depth of Heaven, as a bridegroom leaves his chamber, and traversing the space which divides us from

Himself, will visit us in His supreme goodness; but now, so long as He lives in His Father's bosom, it is for His Father that He lives, and for the divine Spirit who proceeds from Both. For us He remains inactive! For us He sleeps through that long eternity!

Oh! let us beware of speaking thus: the thought is blasphemy. "While I seemed asleep in the bosom of my Father", replies the eternal Word, "already was I watching over you"; and by the mouth of His holy Prophet He declares to the same effect: "I have loved you with an everlasting love".*

Yes, from all eternity, Jesus had adopted us as His children; from all eternity He had counted our steps, and had chosen the angel who was to guard our feet from snares; from all eternity He had known our miseries, and had appointed the voice and the heart that were to relieve them; from all eternity our sins were before Him,

* Jerem., xxxi. 3.

and He had selected the priest who was to raise his hand over our head, and pronounce the absolving words! Ah, may He not then truly say, "from all eternity I was watching over you"?

Ages speed on! The fulness of time arrives. The divine Word is made Incarnate, and comes to dwell amongst us. He is born in a poor stable—I see Him a little child asleep on His mother's bosom—scarce is there a movement to announce life. His eyes are fast closed, and perceive me not; His arms hang round His mother's neck, and stretch not themselves towards me. His feet are bound in swaddling bands. "What means this?" I ask myself. "Jesus is come to save Israel, and Jesus sleeps!"

"I sleep, it is true", replies the divine Infant; "but fear not: my heart is watching".

His heart is watching! Ah, how much love for us does that little child already exhibit! how much love is apparent in that very ex-

cess of humiliation ! how much love in that lowly manger, in those first sighs, in those first tears ! How much love in that sweet mother whom He has chosen for Himself, and who is one day to become ours also ! Already His watchful heart has called around it rich and poor, great and small ! In the voice of the angels speaking to the shepherds, I seem to hear an echo from that heart's sacred depths. "On earth peace to men of good will !"*

So, too, the star which conducts the magi on their perilous way, does not it also bear witness to the ever-watchful tenderness of the heart of Jesus ?

And now for thirty years this Incarnate Word is scarcely seen. His home is among the solitudes of Nazareth. There, hidden from every eye, forgotten by men, buried in profound humility, we might almost fancy He slept. "Yes", exclaims the divine Word, "I appear indeed to sleep ;

* Luke, ii. 14.

but my heart is watching. Alas ! too well do I know how repugnant obedience is to the self-dependence of your nature ; how contrary sweetness and humility to the pride of your soul. Thirty years spent in giving you an example of these sublime virtues, is not too much for my heart. I do not sleep so soundly but that it remains awake to whisper in your ears, ‘Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart’*.

The whole subsequent history of Jesus, as set forth in the holy Gospels, is a realization of the same mysterious enigma, “I sleep, but my heart is watching”.

One day He embarks with His Apostles on the lake of Genesareth ; a tempest rises ; the boat is fast sinking beneath the waves ; Jesus meanwhile, says the Evangelist, was asleep. The Apostles, in their terror, approach and wake Him : “Lord, save us, we perish” ; † such is their cry ; and what is His answer ? Why are ye fear-

* Matt., xi. 29.

† Matt., viii. 25.

ful, O ye of little faith?" as if to say, "I was asleep, it is true, but my heart was watching over you". He rises, commands the winds and the sea; and at once there is a great calm.

And at the last, when the Saviour of the world, in order to accomplish the will of His Heavenly Father, and to consummate the work of our redemption, is lifted up on the Cross of Calvary; when, with arms extended towards us, He bows His thorn-pierced head, and breathes out His soul; even then, does He not seem to say, "I sleep, but my heart is watching? I am falling asleep, indeed, on the rude bed of the cross, but this sleep does not reach my heart. I am quitting, indeed, this mortal life, but my paternal heart does not leave you orphans. I am closing mine eyes to the light of earth, but my heart still regards you with love. All my bones are disjoined, my limbs rent, my very heart pierced with a lance; but from this same heart, thus

cruelly opened, two fertilizing springs shall issue for your sakes, one of water, the other of blood—Baptism and the Eucharist!"

III.

The Eucharist! Ah, this is the chief end of our meditations. At length we have reached the beloved object of our thoughts.

If I have taken delight in illustrating the whole mystery of Jesus Christ, from Heaven to Calvary, by aid of those simple and consolatory words, "I sleep, but my heart is watching", it is because they are realized most especially, as it seems to me, in the loving device of the Eucharist.

Let us draw near to the Tabernacle; let us contemplate Jesus under the Eucharistic veil. What an annihilation is here! what darkness! what unbroken silence! what a profound sleep! "But deceive not yourselves", Jesus seems to say. "If I thus annihilate myself, it is in order to make my love for you more evident. If I observe

so deep a silence, it is that I may elicit your petitions. If I veil Myself thus darkly, it is to reveal Myself more resplendently. If I appear to sleep, it is that I may watch the more”.

O men, whoever you be, whatever be your destitution, your misery, your cares, your infidelities, your sins—here, before the Most Holy Eucharist, be consoled, be calmed, be encouraged! Jesus condescends thus humbly to abide in the Tabernacle, as it were asleep, in order not to terrify you too greatly by the blaze of His majesty; but, be assured, His heart is watching. However weak, then, however miserable, however sinful you may be, draw near and be comforted. The Eucharist is God’s ever wakeful heart. O feeble creatures, here is your strength! O afflicted souls, here is your joy! O poor despairing sinners, here is your salvation!

IV.

So it is, then—the Heart of Jesus neither slumbers nor sleeps. Its love excites it, and keeps it ever in action. It is incessantly watching over my dearest interests; over my mind, to enlighten it; over my heart, to inflame it with its pure love; over my senses, to quiet them; over my thoughts, to direct them aright; over my commonest actions, to ennoble them; over my entire life, to make it divine.

What a consolation for me! but at the same time what a reflection on my own conduct! Between the heart of Jesus and mine, alas! what a contrast! When Jesus appears to sleep, His heart is watching; but I sleep, and my heart watches not! I sleep in my forgetfulness of my duties; I sleep in lukewarmness; I sleep in indifference; and my sleep is the sleep of the heart! My senses are ever wakeful, my passions

ever active, my mind in constant excitement. It is my heart that sleeps. Oh, may it be so no more! O my God! let all within me sleep, all except my heart, for it is upon my heart that Thy divine gaze is ever fixed. *Dominus intuetur cor.* "The Lord looketh at the heart".*

It is true, dust and ashes as I am, and knowing by sad experience my imperfection and misery, I must not be astonished if at times I slumber; but grant me, at least, O Lord! to love Thee, to love Thee ardently, to love Thee above all things: so that, full of confidence in Thy goodness, I too may say, "I sleep, but my heart is watching".

Thus let me pass my days, O my God! loving Thee with my heart; adoring Thee with my heart; serving Thee with my heart; and when Thou shalt call me to Thyself, be it mine to exclaim with my last sigh, "I am now about to sleep the

* I. Kings, xvi. 7.

sleep of death, but it will not be an utter sleep—my heart shall watch ; it shall watch near Thee and in Thee, through a blissful eternity ! Amen”.

Second Meditation.

THE DIVINE FIELD OF THE EUCHARIST.

Audi, filia, ne vadas in alterum agrum ad colligendum.
Hearken, my daughter, go not to glean in any other field.
RUTH, II. 8.

I.

A LOVELIER history than that of Ruth is hardly to be found in the Old Testament. After her first husband's death, we behold her abandoning her family and native land, out of affection for Noemi, her mother-in-law, and from a sincere desire to serve the one true God. With the beloved friend to whom she has devoted her existence, she comes to dwell at Bethlehem; and there, in order to provide for their mutual wants, she disdains not to become a gleaner in the field of wealthy Booz. Moved by Divine inspiration, the noble patriarch presently

recognizes her, gleanings timidly behind his reapers. With exquisite delicacy, he orders them to leave behind a rich harvest for Ruth to gather, and mindful of her wants, invites her to partake of the repast provided for his own household.

This is not all. Divine Providence leads him to discover in Ruth her who, according to his country's laws, ought to be his wife. He marries her, and that sacred union becomes the predestined root from which, three generations after, springs the royal prophet, David.

This pathetic episode, viewed merely in its historical truth, is replete with interest and instruction. We admire the piety of Noemi, the devotion of Ruth, the generous hospitality of Booz, and, above all, the marvellous conduct of Divine Providence towards all these holy persons.

Such a view, however, is far from exhausting the rich materials of edification contained in the inspired narrative.

According to the doctrine of St. Paul, and the unanimous teaching of the Holy Fathers, the Old Testament is throughout a type of the New; we may then be assured that scarcely a person—scarcely a fact—appears in it that does not at the same time serve as a symbol, and, so to say, a prediction, bearing upon Christian days.

Thus regarded, the history of Ruth, already so charming for its own sake, becomes doubly precious; and beneath its beautiful exterior, we discern, peering forth as from a husk, a yet more lovely fruit.

Booz is not only the wealthy owner of the field in which Ruth is gleaning, he rises into a figure of our Divine Saviour Jesus Christ, who in His Gospel so often compares Himself to a husbandman.

Ruth, too, in like manner, is no longer merely the youthful daughter of Moab, who abandons her own country to follow her mother-in-law into the land of Juda. Under the new aspect in which faith presents her

to us, she typifies, on the one hand, the Gentile world abandoning its false gods, and uniting itself to the faithful portion of the Jewish race, in order with it to form a new people, united in the adoration of the same true God; whilst, on the other, we behold in her the figure of a holy soul renouncing the world and its vain pleasures, in order to attach itself to Jesus Christ, and to Him alone!

But does the parallel here cease? Assuredly not. Led on in the same line of thought, I ask myself, what is meant by that field of benediction in which Ruth comes to glean, and where she gathers so rich a harvest?

Ah! can it take me long to find an answer? Can I forget that we speak of Jesus in His sacrament of love, as the bread of life, the wheat of the elect? Under the field, then, of Bethlehem (*the house of bread*), what else can be symbolized but the divine field of the Eucharist?

Let us dwell on this thought; let us devoutly meditate on certain points of the sacred narrative which illustrate it.

II.

And first, observe that Noemi and Ruth are in a state of destitution, until the field of Booz, with its rich sheaves, is opened to them.

Ah, have we not here already a glimpse of the divine Eucharist? It is true the sacred mystery of the Altar does not comprehend the whole of Christianity; our holy religion offers countless additional sources of consolation, of support, of delight; yet, after all, what devout soul but feels in the very centre of her being, that without the Eucharist there is nought for her but misery? The richest pastures cannot satisfy her craving, until she has gleaned at least some few ears in the field of the Eucharist. The most abundant fountains of grace, in comparison with this one, appear

to her as but wells without water; and so long as she has not found Thee, O God of the Eucharist! she cries out with David: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God?"*

Come, and let us accompany beautiful Ruth, as she enters for the first time the field of Booz. See how timidly she advances; how wistfully she follows with her eyes the happy groups of reapers, esteeming herself unworthy of joining their company; how contented she is with her scanty gleanings, not aspiring for a moment to a share of their abundant harvest! But neither her lowliness, nor her timidity, can rob her of her sweet confidence. She has firm hope in that Providence who feeds the birds of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field; she doubts not of obtaining from the good and gracious Father of creation sufficient to supply all her wants. Neither is she mis-

* Psalm, xli. 1.

taken—God gives her good success; and, in a transport of delight, she hastens away with her well-earned sheaf, and hides herself from every eye.

Ah! does not this recall to our minds a feeling once our own? We, too, have seen the day when it was given to us to enter, for the first time, the divine field of Bethlehem.

It was the period of our early childhood; and how it dwells in our recollection! With the timidity of Ruth, we advanced towards the Altar for our first Communion; before us went our mothers and elder Christian friends, who had instructed us in the divine mysteries, and whose wisdom and virtue had won our infant love. We did not as yet, indeed, aspire like them to a rich harvest, reaped day by day at the foot of the holy altars; but we hoped to cull at least a few ears as we followed in their steps. Nevertheless, this humility excluded neither an ardent desire, nor a

filial confidence. We desired—and we desired ardently—for already we had learned to value the hidden gift. We confided—and we confided lovingly—for we could not imagine that the Divine Householder, who so sweetly invites little children to come to Him, would cast us back. And were our hopes deceived? Ah, no! The sacred act completed, what bliss, what felicity was ours, in the enjoyment of our newly-obtained treasure! We had approached with tears of humility and repentance; we came away, bearing with delight that first sheaf, not indeed in our hands, but in our heart!

III.

Scarcely had Ruth entered the field of Booz, when his eye discovered her. Here, again, we are reminded of our type, for Booz, as we have seen, is a figure of that true Master and divine Father, who “beheld us even before we were formed in

the womb";* "Whose eyes are upon the ways of men, and He considereth all their steps".†

Observe how generously he treats her. "Hearken, my daughter", he says, "go not to glean in any other field". He then secretly bids his reapers to scatter handfuls in her path, "that she may glean without shame".

"Hearken, my daughter! go not to glean in any other field". O most significant words! Is it not as though the Divine Master were saying to my soul, "Until now you have been seeking elsewhere, perhaps, for riches and happiness; but, henceforth, cease from such useless efforts; what you love, what you desire, what your unsatisfied heart so yearns for and craves, nowhere will you find, save in the divine field of the Eucharist; but there you will surely find it; thither, then, bend your steps, and glean henceforth in

* Jerem., i. 5.

† Job, xxxiv. 21.

no other field. *Ne vadas in alterum agrum*".

O Divine Master! how true is what thou sayest!

We enter life; and at once a variety of fields are open wide before us. On the right hand, and as it were at our very door, lies the beautiful field of Holy Church, blooming with the virtues of the saints, fragrant with good works, and waving deep with the golden harvest of the divine Eucharist. On the left are the fields of the world, flaunting their showy flowers, and enticing us with delusive charms. Alas! fools that we are, we take the left-hand path; we choose the vain honours, the impure delights of the world. We say to ourselves: "Let us crown our heads with roses before they are withered: let no meadow escape our riot".* Ah! if at last recalled from our miserable wanderings by God's grace—overcome, perhaps, by very

* Wisd., ii. 8.

starvation of heart—we have turned our steps towards the field of the Eucharist; if already, in the joy of our soul, we have gleaned some first-fruits of that blessed harvest, how sweetly will those words of gentle advice fall on our ears from the Divine Father's lips: "Hearken, my daughter, go not to glean in any other field!"

But, in order that our joy may be full, that our harvest may be in good measure and overflowing, the bountiful Master of the field will not be content with simply permitting us to glean in it. Like Booz, He will commend us to His reapers, and these in turn will impart to us abundantly the riches of their Lord.

You will ask, perhaps, who are these reapers so bountiful to Ruth. I reply that, first, they symbolize the holy angels, for angels are our ministering spirits; and our Lord says, "the reapers are the angels";* and

* Matt., xiii. 39.

again, the holy Eucharist is called "the bread of Angels". But secondly, and with still greater reason, we may say that by the reapers are signified the priests of Jesus. It is indeed to them that the dispensation of this divine mystery has been entirely confided: they, and they alone, day by day, at the sacred Altar, multiply within their consecrated hands the Eucharistic sheaves in ever fresh abundance. And, oh! since the day when the sacramental words were first uttered, what harvest have they not reaped! To what countless souls have they not dispensed the food of life! Theirs it is, in obedience to their divine Master, industriously to provide for every child of the sacred family his portion of daily bread; theirs it is, to prepare the divine banquet; to mingle with the "wheat of the elect" "the wine that beareth virgins";* and evermore to cry aloud: "Eat, O friends! and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.

* Zach., ix. 17.

Comedite, amici, et bibite, et inebriamini carissimi".*

And now, see with what blessings the piety of Ruth is rewarded. Not only does she find in the field of Booz, more than enough for herself and Noemi, so that already comfort has succeeded to indigence in the house of the two poor widows; but, in the second place, Divine Providence, "which ordereth all things sweetly",† makes use of Ruth's visit to the field of Booz for the purpose of preparing and cementing between them a happy and blessed union.

Here, again, one can hardly avoid recognizing an adumbration of the precious fruits which the soul derives from the Eucharist.

For, first, the Eucharist is the comfort and wealth of the soul. Without it the soul is poor, but with it she possesses all things. Without it the soul is weak, with it she is full of strength. Let those declare

* Cant., v. 1.

† Wisd., viii. 1.

who have loved, who have enjoyed this mysterious gift. They know by experience the truth of what I say. They will tell you, that in the field of Booz there lies a hidden treasure, and that this treasure is the Eucharist.

Secondly, the Eucharist is a divine means and a pledge of our eternal union with Jesus.

It is not enough for the generosity of Booz, to have given Ruth such a bountiful harvest; he also gives her himself; he unites himself with her by the dearest ties. Noemi, who throughout this transaction does but obey the secret designs of Providence, bids Ruth one evening to go and lie down at the feet of Booz, who is sleeping amidst his sheaves on the open threshing floor, and there to await in silence the will of God. She obeys without a word; Booz wakes; finds her in this submissive posture; and casts his mantle over her in token of that sacred alliance which he then and

there contracts. A few days pass; and after certain formalities required by the law of Moses, the Moabitish stranger becomes the wife of the Jewish Patriarch, and is assumed into the ancestry of Jesus!

Ah! let us once more pierce the veils of the outward symbol; as Ruth, then, obediently went and reclined herself in peace and glad humility at the feet of Booz, so be it ours to repose in sacred expectation and submissive silence before the Tabernacle, where, veiled beneath the Eucharistic species, our dear Saviour sleeps. He sleeps, indeed, for it pleases Him to hide beneath a lowly appearance His divine splendour and majesty; but while He sleeps, "His heart", as we have already seen, "is watching". He will be awake to our secret prayer. With Booz, He will say to us, "Blessed art thou of the Lord, my child, since in order to be with Me, thou hast renounced the vain pleasures of this world". He will cast His mantle over us. He will

unite His own divine heart to ours. He will make us for ever His by a relationship nearer and dearer than the closest ties of Earth.

V.

But if the Christian soul receives so many precious gifts and graces from the divine Eucharist, if she becomes thereby so intimately united with her God, assuredly she is bound in return to use all her efforts towards rendering herself less unworthy of such great favours, by the constant practice of those virtues which the God of the Eucharist loves most.

And what are these virtues? Let us again consult the history of Ruth, and we shall find, I think, that in her lovely character there are three virtues especially prominent:—chastity, charity, and humility. Chastity, for after her first husband's death, she renounces the prospect of a second union in her own land, for the

religion of the true God. Charity, as exemplified in the care which she takes to provide for the wants of Noemi. Humility, again, because, if charity prompts her to exhibit herself in public, it is her low estimation of herself that keeps her so far apart from the privileged groups of reapers.

Chastity, charity, humility! these, then, are the virtues of Ruth; and these, in turn, are the virtues which the God of the Eucharist requires of ourselves.

He requires of us chastity. For "who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord, or who shall stand in His holy place? the innocent in hands and clean of heart".* The God of the Eucharist loves to dwell "amid the lilies".† Mary, the purest of Virgins, was the first also of all human beings, in whom the divine Word, now abiding on our altars, condescended to dwell.

* Ps., xxiii. 4.

† Cant., ii. 16.

He requires of us Humility; for humility is the guard and protection of chastity: the fair flower of purity seeks humility's sweet shade, in order to preserve its freshness and fragrance; besides, in proportion as the Eucharist lifts us above ourselves, we need humility to remind us of what we are. Mary declares herself the handmaid of the Lord, and straightway becomes the Mother of God! The Centurion says to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof",* and already Jesus has granted his petition.

He requires of us Charity. What a self-contradiction, what temerity, to approach the Sacrament of love with an unloving heart! In vain shall I be chaste, in vain shall I be humble, if I have not charity. Without charity I am nought.† God is charity: God is love. He is love in the highest heavens; and the blessed inhabitants of heaven return Him love for love.

* Matt., viii. 8.

† Corinth., xiii. 2.

He is love through the wide world of nature; and natural things requite Him with their praise. But above all, He is love, He is love, in the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; in the Eucharist, then, we are bound most especially to love Him.

The most holy Eucharist demands of us chastity, in reverence for the divine splendour that dwells within it; it demands of us humility, in homage of the lowly state to which Jesus, for our sakes, there reduces Himself; it demands of us charity, in the name of that love to which it bears perpetual testimony. But in the Christian soul, charity towards God is inseparable from charity towards our neighbour. When, therefore, you go to glean in the field of Booz, keep in mind, with charitable Ruth, the wants of Noemi.

O chastity! humility! charity! most lovely daughters of grace! your presence it is that disposes our souls for their marriage

with the Lamb.* The bridal garment which decorates the happy guests at the divine banquet, is the beauteous work of your hands! By your assistance the faithful soul is prepared, like the wise Virgins, to meet her Lord. Thou, chastity, placest in her hand thy burnished lamp; thou, charity, suppliest the oil, which maintains the pure flame; thou, humility, infusest that sweet repose, in which she awaits the divine Spouse. Presently, celestial words are heard. *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollis peccata mundi!* "Behold the Lamb of God". "The Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him".† Yes, Jesus is coming; He is coming to communicate Himself to you! Happy souls, make haste to meet Him at His holy altar. O favoured above Ruth a thousand-fold! For He who calls you is greater than Booz, and His tabernacle far better than the field of Bethlehem! These were but types: the Eucha-

* Apoc., xix. 7.

† Matt., xxv. 6.

rist is a great, an infinite reality. Be assured, all that field's golden harvest, all the generosity of Booz, all the happiness of Ruth, bear no comparison with the treasures of the Eucharist—with the boundfulness of the God of the Eucharist—with the ecstatic bliss which the soul reaps in the enjoyment of the Eucharist. May Jesus, in His divine Sacrament, be our sole joy on Earth, as in Heaven He will be our supreme felicity.

Third Meditation.

HOW JESUS LOVES US.

Dilexi vos, dicit Dominus, et dixistis, In quo dilexisti nos?
I have loved you, saith the Lord, and you have said,
Wherein hast Thou loved us?—MALACH, 1. 2.

I.

NEVER did God address His creatures in kinder or more gracious words, than those in which He appeals to His people by the Prophet Malachias, “I have loved you, *Dilexi vos*”—and never was language uttered more hard and unjust, than that in which His people reply, “Wherein hast Thou loved us?”

That God, who had condescended to call Himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; that God, who by the might of His arm had delivered the Israelites from the yoke of Egypt; who had established them in wealth and power,

upon a fruitful soil; who had never ceased to enlighten them by His inspirations, to gladden them with His presence, to guide and direct them by His messengers; that same most loving and gracious God, taking confidence, as it were, in the remembrance of the long series of blessings which He had lavished on His people, recalls them to their memory, and sums them all up in one word—"I have loved you!" and that people answers with insulting contempt: "Wherein hast Thou loved us?"

Alas! Israel is not the only nation which God has cherished, and to which He has earned the right to say: "I have loved you". Neither, again, is Israel the only nation which disdainfully replies: "Where in hast Thou loved us?"

Even we, the chosen people of Christ, that people of whom Israel was but the type and shadow—we, Christians, whom the Saviour of the world has cherished for eighteen centuries in the bosom of His

tenderness, as a mother nurses her own child; whom He has gathered under His wings, as the hen gathers her chickens;* whom He is ever seeking to detach from the earth, and to lead heavenward, even as the eagle entices her young to fly;† we, too, when addressed by our God with that same tender appeal, “I have loved you—*dilexi vos*”, more ungrateful than Israel of old, have too often dared to reply, “Wherein hast Thou loved us?”

Oh, bitterest of all reproaches that can possibly be uttered against the Almighty! for it attacks the dearest of all His attributes, His goodness; it strikes, so to say, at the very apple of His eye—His love.

Were a poor child of earth, puffed up with foolish pride, to call in question the power of God, and daringly to ask, “Wherein art Thou mighty?” he would, no doubt, commit a serious sin, and give utterance to

* Matt., xxiii. 37.

† Deut., xxxii. 11.

a dreadful blasphemy. Or again, measuring with his short vision the depth of the divine counsels, were he to accuse the justice of God, and to say, "Wherefore, O God! hast Thou done this? Wherein art Thou just?" he would indeed be gravely culpable, and would expose himself to the severity of that justice which he had arraigned. But what are such thoughts—what are such expressions—in comparison with this one—the most cruel of all towards the compassionate heart of God, the most blasphemous of all, the most impious of all—"Wherein hast Thou loved us?"

Oh! if those who allow themselves such guilty imaginings would but listen to their sweet Creator, who disdains not to defend Himself, and to plead the cause of His goodness against their ingratitude, how soon would they be convinced of their sinful delusion, and be ready to exclaim with holy Job: "I know that man cannot be justified compared with God. If he will

contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one for a thousand".*

II.

"Wherein hast Thou loved me?" exclaims the child of poverty; "my life is but a lengthened toil, and my path through this world a path of thorns. The field of the rich man waves not for me, neither do his grapes fill my cup. Fortune, enjoyment, comfort, all that constitutes the happiness of others, to me is refused. Wherein, then, hast Thou loved me?"

"I have loved thee", replies the Lord, "inasmuch as for thee, because thou art poor, I also chose to be born in poverty, to live in poverty, to die in poverty. I have loved thee, and therefore it was that when first my divine lips began to utter the words of eternal life, I said, 'Blessed are ye poor,† for yours is the kingdom of God'. I have loved thee, and therefore, when others have neglected and

* Job, ix. 3.

† Luke, vi. 20.

passed thee by, I have ever remained thy constant friend. The field of the rich man, it is true, waves not for thee; but when has the field of Providence ceased to supply thee with daily bread? Thou hast not, it is true, that wealth which ‘the thief approacheth and the moth corrupteth;’* thou hast not those enjoyments which taint the heart, and pass away with this life; but in their place thou hast the first and foremost title to the kingdom of God; while that very poverty of which thou complainest is thy shield from innumerable perils, and no small assistance in thy path heavenward”.

“Wherein hast Thou loved me?” murmurs the afflicted soul, over the cold corpse of a parent, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a child. “I am plunged in bitterness; Thou hast bereaved me of those who were dearer to me than my own life; these ties, so close, so tender, they were of Thine own forming, O my God! Ah! why didst Thou form them?—or rather, why

hast Thou broken them? and in breaking them, wherein hast Thou loved me?"

"I have loved thee", replies the Lord "inasmuch as for thee I have said, 'Blessed are ye that weep'.* In order at once to sanctify thy tears, and to assist them to flow freely, I myself wept over the grave of Lazarus: in order, again, to teach thee not to weep without hope, I restored to life him whom I had bewailed. Thy whole soul is torn, thou sayest, with agony; well, and therefore it was I willed that mine also should be sorrowful even unto death. A heavy grief, thou sayest, weighs thee down; but, oh! whosoever thou art that so gloomily traversest the path of tears, look up to the Cross as thou passest by the way, and see 'if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow'. "† Neither is it only to the poor and the afflicted that Jesus extends His sympathy. There lives not the human creature that is excluded from His tenderness; there lives

* Luke, vi. 21.

† Lament., i. 12.

not one who can reasonably ask, "Wherein hast Thou loved me?" "I have loved thee, O man of wealth!" might Jesus say, "inasmuch as I have made thee the minister of my providence, and the steward of the poor. I have loved thee, O man of power! inasmuch as I have placed in thy hands my sword, wherewith to smite the wicked, and have furnished thee with innumerable opportunities of benefiting thy fellow-men. I have loved thee, O man of age! inasmuch as I have set upon thy hoary head the crown of wisdom. I have loved you, O young men and maidens! inasmuch as I have chosen your pure hearts for my tabernacle. I have loved you, O little children! inasmuch as from the first I have invited you to my knee".

So, too, with the nations of the world; to them also, as to Israel of old, our Lord appeals. "I have loved you", He says, "inasmuch as from age to age through you I accomplish the designs of my providence

towards mankind. I have loved you, inasmuch as from me alone have you received your wise laws, your sacred institutions, your just monarchs. I have loved you, inasmuch as I alone have given you victories on the battle-field, and have studded the ocean with your fleets. I have loved you, inasmuch as I, and only I, have sustained you in misfortune, have corrected you when you went astray; and, in the time of your greatest difficulty, have provided you with suppliant voices to entreat my mercy, and with noble hearts and hands to defend your cause”.

III.

But let us pause, and consider our own case; for to none does God more tenderly, more endearingly, speak than to ourselves—ourselves, whom, from all eternity He has chosen to be His devoted adorers at the sacred Altar.

“ Oh, how deeply, how ineffably have I

loved you!" whispers in the ear of our heart this all-loving Saviour, whether from amidst the solemnities of the Mass, or from the silent solitude of His tabernacle, or from the radiant altar throne of exposition, or from the recesses of our own souls after Holy Communion. Yes, Jesus, Thou hast loved us, and we know it; most deeply, most ineffably, hast Thou loved us! Ah! if others have the boldness to ask Thee wherein Thou hast loved them, we, at least, O dearest Lord! entertain no such mistrust: far, oh, far from us be the ingratitude of calling in question Thy love!

IV.

It is right to add, however, that this interrogation, which, when originating in a doubt of God's mercy, is so simply wicked, assumes a far different character when it has for its object a deeper perception, a more comprehensive view, of that ineffable love which God has shown for us.

In that case, so far from such an inquiry displeasing our Lord, "Blessed", on the contrary, says the royal prophet—"blessed are they who search His testimonies".* And thus, when Jesus, from the depths of His adorable Sacrament, sighs forth, "I have loved you—*Dilexi vos*", we, in turn, contemplating that excess of love which the Eucharistic Veil enfolds, and filled with a holy desire after an increased appreciation of it, may well exclaim, without the least fear of afflicting His tender heart, and, as it were, in an affectionate colloquy, "Wherein, Lord, hast Thou loved us—*In quo dilexisti nos?*"

"Wherein hast Thou loved us?" To this question, thus devoutly understood, the beloved disciple more than supplies an answer, where, in brief but touching words, he shows us what was occupying the heart of Jesus at the time when He instituted the divine Eucharist. "Jesus, having loved His own", he says, "who were in the world,

loved them to the end".* As much as to say, "Every thought, every word, every act of Jesus was love. At every stage of His earthly course, whether at Bethlehem, or at Nazareth, or at Cana, or at Jerusalem, or in the villages of Juda, or by the Lake of Tiberias—everywhere and at all times, His entire existence was love; but never was His love so lively, so tender, so loving, as on the occasion of His Last Supper".

It may indeed with truth be said, that the sweet spirit of love, which diffuses itself over the whole life of our dear Lord, becomes in the divine Eucharist, as it were, concentrated; for the divine Eucharist unites within itself, at once, the source, the memorial, and the fruits of this love; the source—namely, that all-sacred heart which has so much loved us; the memorial—for what is the Mass, but a perpetual renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary? the fruits—that divine grace which, merited by Christ's loving

* John, xiii. 1.

death and passion, is here so abundantly dispensed. Ah! let me dwell upon this thought. Let me meditate on the sweet Sacrament of the Altar, under this three-fold view—the heart of Jesus—the passion of Jesus—the grace of Jesus; each of these but another aspect of the ineffable love of Jesus!

First, then, the most holy Eucharist contains the divine heart of Jesus. Yes! there, in yonder Tabernacle, is the all-sacred Heart of my adorable Saviour; there it lives, there it energizes, there it glows with ardent love for me! Most true, indeed, it is that Jesus is present, not with His heart alone, but whole and entire, in His divine Sacrament; yet, just as when we kneel before a crucifix, the bowed and thorn-crowned head chiefly attracts our gaze, so, too, in the most holy Eucharist, what we most eagerly seek, what we most readily find, is our dear Lord's Heart.

I ask myself, then, "Wherein has Jesus

loved me?" and already the answer is on my lips, "He has loved me even to giving me His heart".

Ah! what surer proof of love, O my God! than this, could either I have asked, or thy almightiness have given?

It is true, Thou hast left me Thy divine word, and herein 'Thou hast shown Thy exceeding love; but Thy heart was that divine word's living fount; Thou hast loved me then more in giving me Thy heart.

It is true Thou hast left me Thy sublime example, and here again Thy love appears; but it is Thy heart that teaches me humility and meekness,* without which all else is vain; Thou hast loved me then more in giving me Thy heart.

It is true, again, Thou hast left me the hope of eternal felicity, and here, too, I acknowledge Thy immense love; but I am one living in a land of exile; I want a

* Mat., xi, 29.
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present good which may even now console and fortify me; Thou hast loved me then more in giving me Thy heart.

Ah! what was it that emboldened St. John to speak of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved", save that he had once rested his head on his dear Master's heart? And we, O Jesus! whom so often Thou permittest to unite ourselves with Thee, heart to heart in the divine Eucharist,—how can we ever doubt thy love?

Secondly, the holy Eucharist is a living memorial of the passion and death of Jesus, Oh! let me ever bear in mind the awful truth, that He whom I adore upon the altar is present there in the state of a victim. He lies there pierced and slain, so to say, by the sword of love. This sacrifice of the Cross is there at once commemorated and repeated. Every time we assist at Mass, we stand at the foot of Calvary!

When, therefore, I ask myself, "Wherein has Jesus loved me?" my heart at once

replies, " He has loved me, even to renewing before my very eyes the sacrifice of my salvation ! He has loved me even to pouring upon me the precious blood wherewith He has redeemed me ! He has loved me, even to giving Himself to me in the state of a victim for my sins. Oh, that I were thoroughly penetrated with this surpassing truth !

In the designs of the Eternal, the world was to be saved not only by the life of the God-man, not only by His word, by His example, by His miracles, but also, and especially, by His passion and death. But the passion and the death of Jesus are inseparably blended with the perpetual Eucharistic sacrifice, which is identical with that of the Cross. If that passion and death are of infinite worth, so also is the Eucharist of infinite worth. If the love displayed in the former is infinite, so too is the love displayed in the latter. The Passion and the Eucharist form one indi-

visible whole; and what Jesus says of one includes the other. Accordingly, in those sublime words, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends",* I adore indeed the passion, but I joy to trace the Eucharist also. Yes, Lord, Thou hast well said, to die for us once upon the Cross of Calvary, in the midst of torment and ignominy; to die for us perpetually in a mystical manner upon our altars age after age; to offer Thyself up first as a bloody victim, in atonement for our sins; to offer Thyself up for ever after as a daily sacrifice for our happiness;—this indeed is love; this indeed is to love us as none other has ever loved us!

Thirdly, the holy Eucharist imparts to us the grace of Jesus, which is the fruit of His passion; and imparts it, too, in overflowing abundance, as being the most august of all the sacraments.

The other sacraments, it is true, confer

* John, xv. 13.

grace, and this, by uniting us with Jesus, who alone is just, alone is holy, alone is in Himself the all-worthy object of divine complacency. Their *matter*, however, is but an efficacious sign, and no more. Thus in baptism the water that washes away our sins symbolizes the blood of Jesus; and in confirmation the sacred unction symbolizes the might of Jesus wrestling on our behalf with the powers of darkness. But the Eucharist is more than an efficacious sign: It is Itself that very Body and Blood which are signified; insomuch that in the act of receiving It we are made one with Jesus—it is “no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us”.* And hence, although in order to approach the altar we need to have received already that first grace which baptism and penance confer, the Eucharist nevertheless, as confirming and increasing our union with God, and as the appointed means of exalting the soul into the heights of sanctity,

* Gal , ii. 20.

must ever stand, among all the instruments of grace, sovereign and supreme. Here then again, O sweet Jesus! I see how much Thou hast loved me.

Yes! Thou hast loved me in giving me Thy heart; Thou hast loved me in becoming my sacrifice; Thou hast loved me in communicating to me Thy grace; and these three pledges of Thy love—Thy heart which yearns for me, Thy passion which saves me, Thy grace which makes me divine—all centre in the most holy Eucharist, and are to me identical with it, and only another name for Thy love, which if I comprehend in any measure, in the Eucharist I comprehend it!

And so, most dear Lord, whenever Thou shalt say to me as to Thy people of old, "I have loved thee *dilexi vos*", be not afraid lest I ask thee, "Wherein hast Thou loved me, *in quo dilexisti?*" Ah, no! at once in reply I turn my gaze towards the sacred Tabernacle, and with tears of gratitude

exclaim, "Yes, Lord, Thou hast loved me, and I know wherein Thou hast loved me".

V.

But there is a reflection which this meditation suggests, and which, as leading to a practical conclusion, I would not willingly pass over.

In the prophet Malachias, it is God who is represented as saying to His people, "I have loved you", and His people who are represented as answering, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" but let us now with all reverence transpose the speakers, and imagine ourselves as addressing God in His own words, "I have loved Thee".

Ah! how readily do these words rise on the lips! how oft and oft have I uttered them! "My God, I love Thee!" It is my best, my favourite prayer!—"My God, I love Thee!" It is a prayer suited to every place, to every time; a prayer befitting all occasions; in joy and in grief equally

available!—"My God, I love Thee!" It is the glad burthen of all my hymns; it is my heart's responsive echo to the thousand voices of creation—"My God, I love Thee!" It was the earliest aspiration of my childhood, as it will be my latest sigh in death—"My God, I love Thee! I love Thee!" it is my very mother tongue.

But then there comes the thought, and a serious thought it is, may not God with great reason interrogate me in turn, and ask, "Wherein hast thou loved me, *in quo dilexisti?*"

Ah! my soul, be on thy guard against making words and words alone the measure of thy love, lest thou come to resemble that people who honoured God with their lips only, while their heart was far from Him.* Jesus desires our love; but in what way would He have us show it? He would have us show it in good works, in repentance, in sincere conversion, in the pursuit

* Matt., xv. 8.

of holiness. The rule of conduct which He has traced for us is plain and clear. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me".* Oh, what love—what ardent love is there in chastity, in humility, in patience, in the exact practice of all the Christian virtues! The purity of the chaste soul is incessantly repeating before God, as with the voice of an angel, "I love Thee". The hidden life of the humble soul, by its very solitude and silence, seems to say, "I love Thee". The sufferings of the patient soul proclaim in sublimest tones, "I love Thee". To be chaste, to be humble, to be patient, to be charitable, to be growing into saints day by day—this, and not less than this, is the love that Jesus demands of us.

May the all-bountiful Lord grant that as He manifests to us His own love by a series of daily benefits, so we, too, faithful to His divine inspirations, may love Him, not only

* John, xiv. 21.

in word, but in deed, and may thus merit that recompense which He promises:—"If any man love Me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and will come to him, and make His abode with him".*

* John, xiv. 23.

Fourth Meditation.

CONFIDENCE.

Ego sum, nolite timere.

It is I, be not afraid.

MATT., xiv. 27; LUKE, xxiv. 38.

I.

WE may be certain that to see us cherishing a tender confidence in Himself is peculiarly pleasing to Jesus. "It is I, be not afraid"—such was the language in which He addressed His Apostles while on earth, and so too He still speaks from heaven. Let us meditate on these encouraging words, let us seek to penetrate their meaning, and let us be persuaded that the attempt will gratify His loving heart.

The Apostles were by nature, it would seem, weak and timid. There was in them little of that boldness and resolution which

the world so much admires. Jesus, accordingly, who chooses the weak things of the world to confound the strong, again and again took occasion to reprove their timidity and to instil courage into their souls.

For instance, "Be not afraid", He says to them, "of those who kill the body. . . . Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows".*

And, again, "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom".†

And, again, "In the world you shall have distress; but take confidence; I have overcome the world".‡

Among all the motives of encouragement, however, which Jesus sets before His Apostles, I know of none more convincing than those simple words already mentioned, and which occur twice in the

* Luke, xii. 4. † Luke, xii. 32. ‡ John, xvi. 33.

Gospel narrative; "It is I, be not afraid, *Ego sum, nolite timere*".

The first occasion of our Lord's using them was on the sea of Galilee. It was past midnight; and, tossing in a frail bark, the Apostles were vainly struggling against opposing winds. Suddenly Jesus is seen advancing towards them across the billows. The unwonted spectacle does but increase their alarm; but, straightway divining their feelings, "It is I", He says, "be not afraid";* thereby teaching them to place their utmost confidence in Him as the Lord of nature, and supreme controller of its laws; and, at the same time, not obscurely intimating, that in the most violent storms the world could raise, they need be under no apprehension for the Ark of the Church, soon to be committed to their care.

The second occasion was after His Resurrection. The disciples had withdrawn into concealment, and closed the doors of their

* Matt., xiv. 27.

chamber for fear of the Jews, when Jesus unexpectedly stood in the midst of them. "Peace be with you", He says, "it is I, be not afraid";* thus at once constituting them the chosen witnesses of the greatest of all His miracles, and bringing home to their comprehension the great truth, that even death itself had no longer for them aught of terror, now that its conqueror had presented Himself alive before them.

II.

But not to His Apostles alone does Jesus thus speak; to every Christian soul He extends the same winning language; and oh! what joy to think that these words, so calculated to support us amidst the dangers, temptations, and trials of life, flow from no other lips but His own!

Instead of declaring to us, as He has, in His own person, "It is I, be not afraid", Jesus might have contented Himself with

* Luke, xxiv. 36.

encouraging us by the voice of Prophets and Apostles, His ambassadors; who, endowed with power from on high, opposing truth to the world's error, and the force of example to its seductions, might have said to us in His name, "Be not afraid: our strength, which is not our own strength; our virtue, which is not our own virtue; our words, which are not our own words; but the strength, the virtue, and the words of God Himself—all these are on your side".

Or, again, He might have been satisfied with leaving us in charge of those blessed guardians, whose office it is to accompany us through the perils of the world, and, as Raphael guided Tobias, so to bring us home in peace, ever whispering in our ear, "Be not afraid".

But, oh! how far sweeter to hear the Inspirer of prophets, the Master of apostles, the King of angels, Jesus Himself, addressing us and saying, "It is I, fear not, *Ego sum, nolite timere!*"

Yes; these words are spoken to me by my own Almighty Saviour; and from Him alone do I desire to hear them.

Save, indeed, Himself, what power is there in heaven or earth that can justly say,—“Put your trust in me, and fear not”?

I launch forth upon a tranquil sea the ship that bears my treasures in its bosom. Not a cloud, not an adverse breath! Hope insinuates, “Confide in yon peaceful mirror, confide in yon serene sky, confide in yonder sails that gently fill and swell with the soft breeze”. The vessel is off; but scarcely has she passed from the horizon, when down sweeps the hurricane, and in a moment the ocean has swallowed up what I had committed to its charge. Ah! I had deceived myself; neither clear sky, nor tranquil sea, can say to the voyagers of this world:—“Fear not, have confidence in us”.

Can we be more sure of the solid earth

beneath our feet? We intrust to its bosom the foundations for our homes, the plants from which our sustenance is derived. Oh, vain dependence! The earth heaves, and swallows up all we possess. Never can it say even to those whom it bears and nourishes, "Fear not; have confidence in me".

Or again, I have friends on whom I rely. But how vainly. Either they are powerless, and in the event can do nothing for me; or they are powerful, and pass me over. One is deterred by the difficulty of serving me; another is torn from me by death; and at last, I am compelled to own, that amongst all my associates not one can say with justice, "Trust in me, and fear not".

To Thee, and Thee alone, O Jesus! does it belong of right thus to speak; with Thee, and Thee alone, promise and performance are one and the same thing.

"Fear not", Thou sayest to the sinner, "it is I,—I, the Lamb of God, immolated for thee upon Calvary; I whose heart has

so long sighed for thee; I whose feet have wearied themselves in seeking thee; I, whose arms are outstretched from the cross to embrace thee; I, whose blood flows down upon thee to wash out all thy guilt for ever. It is I, be not afraid".

"Fear not", Thou sayest to the timid and downcast soul, "it is I, thy light and thy salvation; whom, then, shalt thou fear? It is I, the protector of thy life; of whom, then, shalt thou be afraid? If armies in array should stand against thee, thy heart shall not tremble; if the battle should rise up against thee, in this shalt thou be confident".*

"Fear not", Thou sayest to the just and suffering soul, "it is I,—I, thy dear Lord and loving Redeemer, who, in sending these trials upon thee, do but seek to multiply thy merits; who chastise thee, because I love thee; who am here thy salvation, and will be in heaven thy exceeding great reward".

* Ps., xxvi. 1.

III.

“It is I, be not afraid”. Musing still upon these tender words, methinks they supply me with an interpretation and keynote, so to say, to the whole mystery of Christ’s coming,—His incarnation, birth, life, passion, and death!

How different was the language which He used of old with the gross-minded and rebellious Jews! To them He spoke not, save from the midst of vollied lightnings! His voice was mingled with the thunder’s roar; and the throne from whence His edicts issued was a mount of fire! Accordingly the people said to Moses, “Speak thou to us, and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die”.* Not such, however, is the wish of the Christian people; on the contrary, it is their joy, their delight to hear their Lord Himself speak; and, oh! what engaging sweetness is there in His

* Exod., xx. 19.

every word ! what incentives to confidence in every event, in every circumstance of His recorded life !

Picture to yourself the Infant Jesus at Bethlehem. How reassuring is the scene to the poor soul, alarmed at the contemplation of her past guilt ! This fair babe before us is God ! but where are the terrors of the divine Majesty ? He is a King, yea, the King of kings, but where are the dread accompaniments of power ? All that meets the eye is a little Infant in His mother's lap, attended by a poor artizan ! meanwhile, angel strains peal down. Soft falls the light in silver showers from the mystic star that keeps its watch overhead ; and as shepherds and magi bend in turn before the divine Child, His own infant smile, His mother's endearing caresses, St. Joseph's tranquil happiness, all things about and around seem to say for Him :—"It is I, be not afraid".

We pass from Bethlehem to the holy

house of Nazareth—from the manger to the carpenter's workshop; still, all is the same; all is humility, tenderness, peace; everywhere confidence! There is nought to excite trepidation or dismay. What, indeed, has terror to do with that lowly Youth, growing up in docility and obedience, under His virgin mother's eye? As at Bethlehem, so, too, at Nazareth, in softest tones falls on our ear, "It is I, be not afraid".

At length His public life commences. Again what marvellous sweetness! His whole conduct tends but to engage our confidence. He does not dispute; He does not cry out; neither is His voice heard in the streets. He breaks not the bruised reed. He quenches not the smoking flax.* His every accent is peace and divine encouragement. To every heart He whispers, "Be not troubled—It is I. Be not troubled, ye poor—am I not your wealth? Be not troubled, ye mourners—am I not your consolation?"

* Matt., xii. 19.

Be not troubled, ye blind—am I not your light? Be not troubled, ye lame and palsied—I will make you whole. Be not troubled, ye lost wanderers—I will bear you home”.

Finally, He dies on the cross! And, oh! is there aught in that death which tends to diminish the confidence His life inspires? Reason left to herself might have conjectured that He, who by His miracles had proved His omnipotence, would, if not in the course of His life, at least at its close, confront His enemies, and crush His persecutors. But it is not so. Like the lamb, dumb before its shearer,* so does He, meek as ever, await the approach of death. He offers His cheek to the smiters, His bared shoulders to the scourge, His lips to the vinegar and gall; and if, at the commencement of His passion, He prostrates at His feet those who come to seize Him; if, later on, He rends the rocks, and obscures the sun,—these are no works of vengeance, but have rather for

* *Isaias*, liii. 7.

their object to excite in His children, in addition to the confidence which His love inspires, that other confidence which proceeds from a sense of His Almightyness. On the one hand, He seems to say, "Fear not; because in Me, here dying for you, you behold your fond Redeemer, who is all affection and meekness"; on the other—"Fear not; because in Me you behold, at the same time, your infinite Lord and Creator, supreme over nature and the world".

IV.

But it was not enough for the loving heart of our dear Saviour to inspire with confidence all who came near Him during His earthly life; He desired to perpetuate the same touching sentiment from age to age. And how shall this be done? How shall Jesus still, after the lapse of centuries, say to the faithful soul, "It is I—be not afraid"? . . . In His immense love for us, He has devised means by which these inspiring

words are repeated, so to say, every instant to the end of time; and this marvellous device is—the most holy Eucharist!

Yes, day by day, from our altars, at the solemn moment of consecration, Jesus says, by the voice of His priest, “This is my body—it is I, *ego sum*”. And at the same instant, offering Himself up as an almighty victim to the eternal Father, interposing the shield of His divine humanity between ourselves and a justly angered God, He seems to add, “Be not afraid—*nolite timere*”.

“It is I—be not afraid”. Come, my soul, and let us muse upon these loving words of our Redeemer, no longer as limited to the time of His earthly sojourn, but rather as perpetually breathing forth from His countless tabernacles over the wide world. We shall find that as the Eucharist is the tenderest exhibition of Christ’s love for us, so, too, it is our liveliest incentive to an unhesitating confidence in Him in return.

“It is I!” Considering that Jesus has so long since passed into the heavens, it might be argued that we could no longer expect from Him now that endearing language which He used on earth. “In His present glorified state”, it might be said, “angels and saints in light are alone the fit objects of His more familiar tenderness, even as to them alone He manifests the full splendour of His beauty and majesty, inebriating them perpetually with ever new delights”. But the case is far otherwise. Not in heaven alone, not in His lifetime alone, does Jesus tenderly whisper, “It is I”. With Him one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* Time cannot touch that loving heart. We kneel before the sacred altar, and at once in the ear of faith vibrate the self-same tones.

“It is I—be not afraid”. “Fear not”, He seems to say from the altar, “for first, in this humble condition to which I am

* II. Pet., iii. 8.

reduced for love of you, what cause, what ground for fear can you detect? In my humiliation at Bethlehem, the shepherds feared me not, but my humiliation is greater here. In my life of obedience at Nazareth, Mary and Joseph feared me not; but my obedience is greater here. If, in my mortal life, I was destitute, here I am destitute much more. If then I had not where to lay my head, now I have no place for repose save the tabernacle of the Altar and your own hearts!

“ Yet, once more, and for another reason, fear not. For here, on the other hand, lies centred my Almighty power. Here, in the Holy Eucharist, have I deposited all my graces, all my benedictions. Fear not, on account of the infirmities of your flesh,—for here is my sacred flesh, the antidote of yours. Fear not on account of the stains left by past guilt,—for here shall you wash them out in my blood. Fear not, thou lost sheep,—here is fold for thee, and

rich pasture. Fear not, poor prodigal,—here is thy feast of reconciliation. Fear not, poor daughter of Samaria,—here mayest thou both know and taste the gift of God. Fear not, poor mangled pilgrim,—here is oil and wine to heal thy wounds. Fear not, ye children of Adam, one and all,—here is that veritable Tree of Life, by partaking of whose fruits ye shall become as gods. Fear not, it is I”.

O my God! how consoling are these words! how joyfully does my heart respond to Thy appeal! Yes, when I bow before the holy altar, where Thy presence dwells, awful and adorable as I know that presence to be, I will, nevertheless, fear not. Love shall cast out fear. When, as there I kneel, the memory of my sins comes over me, and imagination, vividly awake to the perils of life, sets before me my innumerable spiritual enemies—the storms of the world—the tribulations of the flesh—even then I will not be afraid; but comforted with the certainty of Thy almighty protection, will

resign myself utterly to Thy will: and thus, day by day gaining new strength in the practice of virtue, and in the conquest of sin, I shall discover, in the end, that if the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, a loving confidence in the God of the Eucharist is the surest way to its growth and consummation.

V.

But if Jesus, in His Holy Sacrament, thus affectionately reanimates our souls in their path heavenwards, let us not forget that He claims of us a return of love. He claims of us that, as He encourages us to confide in Him, so He too, on His part, when He enters our souls in Holy Communion, may be encouraged to confide in us. He would have me say, in my turn, and say it in all truth and sincerity, —“ It is I, do not fear”.

“ It is I, Lord, Thy too long rebellious child. I who have so oft offended Thee. I whom Thou knowest to be so weak and so

guilty. It is I, nevertheless, and, in spite of all, Thy now faithful and loving servant. Oh! fear me no more. Fear not that I shall ever again break my promise,—It is I, be not afraid”.

Yes! let us not doubt that, despite our past infidelities, Jesus will trust us again, provided we really love Him; whereas, on the contrary, our best works, if done without love, will not succeed in reassuring His afflicted heart. “Better are the wounds of a friend than the deceitful kisses of an enemy”.*

Remember how His passion opens with one of the twelve—one whom He had deigned to admit to the first Eucharistic Feast—coming near and kissing him. Seemed not that kiss to say, “It is I, Lord, be not afraid—It is I, Thy good friend and Thy guest”? But Judas loved not his Master; there was then only too great reason to fear his treachery, and that kiss was but its outward expression.

* Prov., xxvii. 6.

A few hours pass, and another disciple, Simon Peter, thrice denies his Lord. Scarcely, however, have the words escaped his lips, than going forth, he weeps bitterly ; and when his Divine Master, after His resurrection, thrice interrogates him, “Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?”* thrice in return he answers, with an effusion of tenderness and penitence, “Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee”—“Fear not, Lord”, he seems to say ; “have confidence in me ; I have sinned, but I love Thee ; I have sinned, but, oh ! distrust me not”. And did Jesus distrust him ? Far from it. He straightway confirms to the Prince of the Apostles the commission already confided to his care. The denier of his Lord becomes the rock of the Church, and holds in his hands the keys of Heaven !

Oh ! let us learn from this sublime example ; let us learn to love Jesus with our whole heart, and He will give us all his confidence.

* John, xxi. 15.

Mutual confidence—confidence on our part towards Jesus, confidence again on the part of Jesus towards us; this, as it seems to me, was one object our dear Lord had in instituting the very Eucharist itself; assuredly the Sacrament of the Altar is the reign of confidence between God and man throughout the world; alas! what madness is ours, in so coldly responding to our dear Saviour's tender advances!

The day will come, when He will exact from us a strict account of that special grace of faith in the holy Eucharist, which is His gift to the Christian soul—the day, that is to say, of the last judgment. Then will Jesus manifest Himself to a guilty world; then will the sacramental veil part asunder, and display that countenance so long concealed; but it will be a countenance full of terror for those who have repaid His confidence only with ingratitude and oblivion.

“It is I”, He will say to them; “behold Him whom you have outraged, insulted,

despised ; it is I, but be afraid and tremble ! fear ye, before the wrath of the Lamb”.*

Then turning to those blessed ones of His Father, who, supported by their sweet confidence in the Eucharist, have patiently ascended, step by step, from virtue to virtue, the holy hill of Sion : “It is I”, He will say : “behold at last your Saviour and your God ; much have you had to suffer, but your time of trial is over. Fear not, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom—*nolite timere, quia complacuit Patri vestro dare vobis regnum*”.† O most divine kingdom ! may God bring us all to it in His own good time.

* Apoc., vi. 16.

† Luke, xii. 32.

Fifth Meditation.

THE DOVE OF THE ROCK.

Estote quasi columba nidificans in summo ore foraminis.

Be ye like the dove that maketh her nest in the mouth of the hole, in the highest place.—JEREM., xlviii. 28.

I.

IN the language of the Holy Ghost, the faithful soul is symbolized by the dove; and where, indeed, throughout the natural creation, could be found for it a more appropriate type; timid, as it is, like the dove; sincere and simple, like the dove; loving, like the dove; rapid in its flight aloft, like the dove? Hence, accordingly, in Holy Scripture, that book of the soul, the dove appears again and again as its most frequent and favourite similitude.

Among the texts that at once recur to the memory, let me select three, which have, at least for my own mind, a special charm.

With the first, the Bridegroom of the

Canticles supplies me, thus addressing his beloved: "My Dove, in the holes of the rock, show me thy face—*Columba mea, in foraminibus petræ, ostende mihi faciem tuam*".*

The second is from the prophet Jeremias; "Leave the cities, ye that dwell in Moab, and be ye like the dove that maketh her nest in the mouth of the hole, in the highest place—*Estote quasi columba nidificans in summo ore foraminis*".

The last is that pathetic aspiration of the royal Psalmist:—"Who will give me wings like a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest—*Quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbæ, et volabo, et requiescam*?"†

In these several passages methinks I discern an image of one and the same soul, which first hides herself in the holes of the rock, then makes her dwelling in its topmost heights, and finally soars away to her rest.

But how shall we interpret each passage

* Cant, ii. 14.

† Ps., liv. 7.

respectively? What is implied, first, by these holes of the rock where the dove shows her face to her beloved? then by that lofty height where she builds her habitation? and then again, by that flight and that rest?

Oh, divine Spirit! who didst not disdain to take the form of a dove, and whose conversation is with the simple,* these mystical words are of thy own inspiring! Assist me to draw from them grace and benediction. I will meditate upon them in all faith and simplicity; I will meditate like the dove—*meditabor ut columba*.†

II.

Our first text represents the dove hiding herself from all save her beloved in the hollows of the rock. But wherefore has she fled to those hollows, and what means that rock?

Wherefore has she fled thither? Doubtless she had her own devcot once, where

* Prov., iii. 22.

† Is., xxxviii. 14.

she enjoyed peace and safety ; but at an evil day she forsook it. Poor truant ! she forsook her secure home for an imaginary bliss, and being by nature weak and unendowed with powers of resistance, soon found herself environed with perils. The pitiless fowler pursued her—the hawk hovered over her head—enemies rose on every side. Still, were she only weak, her case were not so miserable ; but, alas ! she has been imprudent also. She has loved danger, and has all but perished in it ;* she feared not the snare, and it has well nigh entangled her. Nay, worse still—it may be that to weakness and imprudence she has added guilt ; she has been “as the dove that is decoyed”, and with that same dove “has lost her heart—*Columba seducta non habens cor*”.†

Thus bewildered, thus imperilled—what can she do?—whither go?—to whom betake herself? Oh, happiness ! While all persecute and plot against her, there is one

* Ecclus., iii. 27.

† Os., vii. 11.

who still remains her friend ; while by turns cries of death and notes of seduction ring in her ears, lo ! a voice that sweetly calls, “ Come, oh, come, my dove ! and shelter thee in the hollows of the rock ! ” Oh, how kind that proffer of the rock ; for she is defenceless !—how kind that proffer of its hollows ; for she needs shelter and repose ! She hears the call ; she accepts the refuge. There, in those recesses, she tends her wounds ; there she plumes her ruffled wings ; there she hides her shame !

Ah, who has not already anticipated me in discovering here an image of the poor deluded soul, which, following its own caprices, has wandered astray in the world—far away from Him who is its salvation and true joy ? Alas ! how few are there who, glancing back on their life past can fail of recognizing in it the wanderings of the dove, the wounds of the dove, the sorrows of the dove ? but wanderings far more fatal—wounds far more dangerous—sorrows far more poignant.

The snares of death compassed us about, the perils of hell surrounded us,* and we heeded them not; the wicked bent their bow, and prepared their arrows in their quiver, to shoot us unawares;† but we felt no alarm. Madmen that we were, we said peace, peace! where there was no peace; we loved what should have been our hate, we hated what we should have loved; and dashed recklessly against the net of the fowler, little dreaming that we jeoparded our eternal salvation.

But let us suppose the poor soul to become, by the illuminating power of divine grace, aware of her sad condition, in what perplexity does she find herself! What is she to do? To whom can she fly? Easy enough it was to wander astray; but how to return she knows not. The power was hers to destroy herself; to save herself is beyond her ability. How melancholy is her prospect! Heaven and earth have equally lost their charm for her—heaven,

* Ps., cxiv. 3.

† Ps., x. 3.

because she is guilty; earth, because she is miserable.

But while all seems lost, Jesus is looking down in pity; for Jesus is the soul's friend;* —He calls her; and what says He? "Come, oh, come, my dove! hide thee in the hollows of the rock; in the hollows of the rock show me thy face!" Oh, felicitous invitation! Oh, words of most divine comfort! For what is this rock? It is no created refuge—it is Jesus Himself. "That rock", says the apostle, "is Christ—*petra autem erat Christus*".† And what, again, are the holes of the rock? The Psalmist declares—"They have dug my hands and my feet."‡ Come, then, O soul!—come to Jesus!—make haste to hide thee in the wounds of the Crucified!

Oh, divine rock! how great is thy strength! Oh, most sacred hollows of the rock! how salutary is your shade! Sheltered in these beloved cells, I enjoy undisturbed

* Wisd., xi. 27. † I. Cor., x. 4. ‡ Ps., xxi. 17.

security. Should the whirlwind be unchained, I fear not its fury; what storm can shake the rock? Should the enemy pursue me, thirsting after my life, concealed in these recesses, I can laugh his threats to scorn. Here, in this calm retreat, my soul shall forget her miseries; here shall strength return, and hope revive anew, while, with David, I exclaim, "Except the Lord had been my helper, my soul had all but dwelt in hell".* "My soul hath been delivered as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are delivered; our help is in the name of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth".†

III.

So, then, our dove has at length found a refuge; but is a refuge all that she needs? Ah, no! she aspires to something better still; for—following out the idea (if I may be so bold) of blending our three

* Ps., xciii. 17.

† Ps., cxxiii. 7.

texts into one figure—where do we find her next? Still in the rock, still in the holes of the rock, but higher up. “Be ye like the dove”, says Jeremias, “that makes her nest in the mouth of the hole, in the highest place”.

Observe how the alarm, which at first prompted her to hide herself, has given place to a serene confidence. Whereas, before, wounded, wearied, and miserable, she was only too glad to find a temporary shelter in the base of the rock; now, on the contrary, we behold her peacefully settled in open day, on its topmost ledge. Yes! it would seem that, recovered from her terror, and recruited in strength, she had conceived the courageous thought of ascending to a higher region of the rock. Doubtless, the flight cost her more than one effort; but help unseen was at hand. Its summit is gained; and there “in the mouth of the hole, in the highest place”, she builds her airy nest.

That highest place—what does it symbolize? The royal Psalmist supplies the very explanation which one would have desired, but hardly have presumed to give. “The sparrow hath found her a home, and the turtle a nest, where she may lay her young ones—Thy altars, O Lord of hosts! my King and my God!”* Yes, O my God! this highest place, this topmost ledge, is Thy holy Eucharistic Tabernacle, elevated aloft in the serene atmosphere of Thy Church, high above the habitations of the plain and the din of the world. There, on that lofty summit, will I also build a nest for my soul, if Thou wilt permit. Yes, as Thy prophet Jeremias counsels, I will bid farewell to the cities of Moab; I will forsake the low places of the earth, inasmuch as I belong to earth no longer; I will leave the dead to bury their dead; and will mount to the sublime regions of the Tabernacle where Thou dwellest.

* Ps., lxxxiii. 4.

Oh, how sweet to picture to ourselves, under the image of that aerial cliff, in whose crevice the dove builds her nest, the divine tabernacle of Jesus! Oh! how truly is the Eucharist the summit of that rock, which is Christ! I contemplate the love which Jesus has for me, and at once in the Eucharist I behold the topmost reach of that love! I contemplate the gifts which Jesus bestows upon me, and at once in the Eucharist I behold the pinnacle of those gifts! I contemplate the happiness which Jesus in this life imparts to me, and at once in the Eucharist I recognize the highest point of that happiness!

For a long time, my utmost attempt was to hide myself in the wounds of Jesus, as in the hollows of a rock. Meditations on the sufferings of my crucified Saviour wholly occupied my repentant heart. I bewailed my sins which caused them. I wept over my misery, and I confessed my guilt. The absolving words were said;

His precious blood was poured upon me; and, oh! what consolation did I find therein! But when I had humbled myself in the depths of His passion; when mortification and solitude had broken down my love of self and of the world, then did a voice sound in my ears:—"Go up higher, *ascende superius*,* go up to the altar of thy God, that God who made glad thy youth".

O divine Tabernacle! be thou henceforth the habitation of my soul. In thee would I dwell; still in the rock, still in the hollows of the rock, but higher from the earth, with less of fear than before, with more of confidence and joy. "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God!"†

* Luke, xiv. 10.

† Ps., lxxxiii. 1.

IV.

Finally, there is the third text. “Who will give me wings like a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest?” Here our dove neither seeks a refuge, nor builds a habitation. To the holy envy of the Psalmist, she takes wing, and flies away to some far-off place of repose. True, she had found in the heights of the rock a home most excellently suited to her; but this dwelling, however lofty, still rested upon earth, whereas, according to holy Job, as man is made for labour, so the bird to soar.* While in her nest, her strength has increased, her pinions have grown. Presently she begins to kindle with an ardent desire of the skies. At last, unable to restrain herself any longer, she mounts aloft; she soars away, and like the dove of Noe, is seen no more.

* Job, v. 7.

In this beautiful image, I behold shadowed forth that mysterious flight, by which the soul speeds away to her God, and seeks her rest in His eternal bosom. Oh, happy flight! Oh, most happy rest! True indeed it is, that the holy Eucharist infinitely surpasses aught else upon earth, that it is more delicious than all delights of the world, more precious than all its riches, more glorious than all its honours, more noble and excellent than even the highest supernatural gifts. Nevertheless, the Holy Eucharist is not Heaven. In the Eucharist Jesus is present under a veil; in heaven, He is beheld as He is! For the Eucharist, we need faith no less than love; in heaven, love reigns alone.

But if with the Psalmist you ask, *who is he* that will give us wings in order to this happy flight? let it be answered boldly, that death, and death alone, gives us these wings; death, so full of anguish for him who believes not; so sweet, so consoling

for those whose soul has nestled in the Tabernacle of their Lord.

Yes, death gives us far more than it takes. It takes from us this transitory world, which has so often beguiled us by its vanities; it gives us the wings of a dove that we may fly away and be at rest.

V.

The most sacred wounds!—the Holy Eucharist!—death!—such then, my soul, are the steps by which thou must ascend to thy God. The first shelters thee from the enemy, the second replumes thy wings, the third admits thee to the skies.

O my God! I ask of Thee but three things; deny me not:—the dove's refuge in Thy wounds; the dove's sojourn in Thy tabernacle; the dove's rest in Thy bosom.

Sixth Meditation.

THE GIFT OF GOD.

Si scires donum Dei.

Didst thou but know the gift of God.

JOHN, iv. 10.

I.

AMONG the numerous compassionate sayings of our dear Lord, there is not one, methinks, more overflowing with the tenderest pity, than that which He addressed to the Samaritan woman, "Didst thou but know the gift of God!" Ah! what heart has not felt some chord within it respond to those mysterious words, so full of anxious interest for that poor soul, and at the same time, if the expression may be permitted, so touchingly graceful, so instinct with marvellous knowledge in the art of converting souls to God! "Didst thou but know the gift of God!" Observe; He does not as yet reveal the nature of this gift, but He

excites in her heart its anticipation and desire. He reproves not her ignorance of it; nevertheless, He clearly intimates that, did she but know its real excellence, she would love it, and that if she loved it, she would be saved.

Oh! how one sighs to have been present, though but for a moment, at that affecting scene, when Jesus, wearied with His long seeking for us, wearied out with His oft repeated calls, wearied out, above all, with our ingratitude and our sins, sate Him down by Jacob's well, and conversed with the poor daughter of Samaria, who had come thither to draw water. Oh! to have seen Him in the blessed act of saving an immortal soul! Oh! to have caught that celestial glance of unutterable meaning, which no less than those heart-piercing tones proclaimed: "Didst thou but know the gift of God".

I picture to myself my dear Saviour's form, as there He sat, His voice, His look, His every gesture, all radiant with inspi-

ration, and authoritatively announcing,—
“It is thy God who speaks; refuse not to hear His voice. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. Learn, oh, learn the gift of God”!

Yet, neither would it have surprised me to behold Him, in His supreme condescension, laying authority aside, and taking the imploring tone of a suppliant, “Ah! didst thou but know the gift of God! didst thou but know, how in that sublime gift thou mightest find consolation for all thy sorrows, support in all thy weakness, forgiveness of all thy sins; didst thou but know that this gift is Myself! Myself, the joy of angels and the salvation of men! But, alas! ignorance of this divine gift is far from being the whole of thy misery. Too well am I aware that thou art also, in addition, feeble, inconstant, the slave of passion, ungenerous on the side of virtue. Ah, how can I so offer thee my gift, that thou shalt not reject it? how press it upon thee, without

repulsing thee? Oh, that you would hesitate no more! Oh, that you would but consent to taste what I proffer! Oh, that you knew the gift of God!"

Doubtless as Jesus discoursed with the Samaritan, sentiments such as these thronged His all-merciful heart; and we whom He has attracted to Himself, in His ineffable love,—how often do occasions arise, when, after His divine example, we too find cause so to feel and speak with regard to those thoughtless and worldly souls amongst whom our lot is thrown!

A life wholly of the senses, wholly lavished upon outward objects, permits them not to appreciate the interior beauty of the daughter of Sion. Long formed habits of frivolity and dissipation have closed their minds against every serious thought; yet, nevertheless, their eternal interests are imperilled, their salvation in jeopardy, their days running out—death at hand; meanwhile, the utmost efforts of our zeal seem

powerless to reach them. Between them and us there is a great gulf fixed; we have no common ground; their ideas are not our ideas; their language is not our language; above all, their love is not our love. What salutary influence can we direct upon them? What can we do, what can we say, that will affect them?

Ah! when Providence brings us into more familiar contact with such persons;—terrified at the thought of the dreadful future which they are preparing for themselves, and ardently yearning to impart to them that happiness which we have found in Christ, how anxiously do we lie in wait for the moment when a word of admonition can be uttered with least pain to their pride; and when that moment comes, the first sentence we ask, is it not this: “Didst thou but know the gift of God”?

But most especially is this the language we employ when speaking to the world of

that which singularly and superexcellently is the gift of God,—of that great mystery, to which our Lord's saying is so applicable, "All do not receive this word, but they to whom it is given"—of the divine Eucharist!

Never is our language more above the world, and consequently more incomprehensible to it, than when we speak of the most holy Sacrament. The world knows not the Eucharist; it has never tasted its sweetness. But we know it; and oh, how well! We know that its frequent and fervent reception has removed the thick scales of ignorance from our eyes, and opened them to the light of God's truth. We know that if our hearts were once hard and intractable, the Eucharist has succeeded in gradually softening them; that if our passions were violent, it has calmed and subdued them. We know that a single half hour at the foot of the altar has been

worth to us years of enjoyment in the tabernacles of sinners.* We know that while the pleasures of the world are mingled with gall, whilst its dissipations enervate and quickly turn insipid, to the Eucharist may be applied what is said of Wisdom:—“Her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness”.† We know too, that for those who honour His Tabernacle upon earth, Jesus has provided a Tabernacle incorruptible in the skies. Yes, all this we know, and therefore it is that we never tire of proclaiming the sweetness of this heavenly banquet.

But what is all this to the world? What cares it for the Eucharist? What value does it set upon it? Not the worth of a momentary pleasure, of the merest passing distraction; and hence, when we strive to persuade it that all its empty vanities are as nought in comparison with this heavenly treasure, language is foiled in the attempt,

* Ps., lxxxiii. 11.

† Wisd., viii. 16.

and our **best** arguments drop forceless and ineffectual.

O my **Lord** and Saviour! when Thy Providence shall bring near me some worldly heart, and invite me to lead it on to the knowledge and the love of Thy holy Sacrament, not my own words, but Thine will I employ; I will remember Thy behaviour towards the woman of Samaria; I will borrow Thy very expression; and oh, would that I could borrow also Thy heart and voice; and, earnest to impress upon my hearer how much he loses by his ignorance of Thee in this sacrament of Thy love, all that he would gain by knowing Thee, I too will say:—"Ah, didst thou but know the gift of God!"

II.

But Jesus does not stop here. He continues the discourse thus graciously commenced, and ceases not till by little and little He has led on the poor Samaritan

to confess and adore in Him the true Messias. Let us follow step by step in the path of divine Wisdom Incarnate, thus sweetly disposing all things for the salvation of His creature; and let us see what further lesson may be gained from the inspired narrative.

“Give me to drink”. Such had been the words with which Jesus commenced this memorable conversation. He had put himself in the position of a person asking an alms or charitable service. Neither, as St. Augustine remarks, did the Samaritan, on her part, meet His petition with a refusal. If she does not immediately fulfil our Lord’s request, the cause lies not in any want of charity, but rather in her profound sense of unworthiness, as belonging to a despised race. “How dost thou”, she says, “being a Jew, ask of me to drink, who am a Samaritan woman?” It would seem that while charity prompts her to draw the water, surprise, for the instant, at His

deigning to ask a favour of her wholly absorbs her mind.

Jesus, however, who sounds the depths of every heart, has already discovered her good will; and, inasmuch as a single cup of water given in His name is not without its reward,* in recompense for that good intention, which His grace has already inspired, He raises her soul to higher things, and exalts it from a state of mere material benevolence to the conception of that spiritual charity which is its true life. She had but thought of giving Him a sip from Jacob's well; but hear His munificent proffer in return: "Didst thou but know the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water".

It needed no more; in a moment the truth flashes on her mind; she sees that Jesus has a gift to bestow, surpassing her

* Mark, ix. 40.

own, and in her thirst for that promised draught, exclaims with ardour, "Lord, give me that water—*Domine da mihi hanc aquam*".

III.

How applicable is this narration to the case of many a poor worldly soul, of whose class the woman of Samaria may be considered a type!

The world, enshrouded as it is in the dense obscurity of a mere material life, is incapable of Christian virtues; chastity, mortification of the senses, self-denial, are all but unknown to it. One virtue, however, there is, to which it is not altogether a stranger—charity to the poor. It is by no means so rare a thing to see persons, enamoured apparently of the world's vanities, and little devoted to the holy practices of a Christian life, exhibiting nevertheless much amiable zeal in the cause of the sick, the indigent, the bereaved, the ignorant, the

miserable ; such charity, it is true, is far from sufficiently meeting the necessities of its objects ; for “ not by bread alone does man live” ;* nay, it suffices not for the charitable soul itself, for it is a small thing to love and serve the poor, while we neglect God. Nevertheless, who shall deny that such works are pleasing in the eye of heaven, and, as not wholly devoid of God’s grace, plead for their kind doers ? Doubtless He, who has said, “ whatsoever ye have done to one of these my least brethren, you did it unto me”,† He it is, who, under the form of His poor, presents Himself before these amiable children of the world, engaged in their works of charity, as formerly before her of Samaria, entreating, as it were, their alms ; and when, far from scornfully rejecting Him, they deal bountifully with Him, in the fulness of their hearts, oh ! shall He be less liberal in return to them than of old to her ? Shall He not say to them, “ Did you but

* Matt., iv. 4.

† Matt., xxv. 40.

know who it is that your pity has relieved, you would ask of Him, and He would bestow upon you in return, not the water only, but the bread also of life eternal. You give a temporary succour, you should receive in exchange the food of immortality"? Yes! let us not doubt but our Lord speaks thus to many a poor soul, that with all its good feelings is yet far from Him; and why should not that soul reply, after the example of the Samaritan, "Lord, evermore give me this bread"?

IV.

But observe, her desire alone, excellent as it is, does not suffice to put her in possession of the divine gift. Two impediments still remain, which present an insurmountable opposition to it!—corruption of heart, and an unenlightened mind.

Corruption of heart; for when Jesus, with the view of unveiling to her the guilt of her past life, and of bringing her to a

sincere confession of it, says, "Go call thy husband", at once she replies, "I have no husband". Whereupon He whose glance had long since pierced the thick darkness of that defiled conscience, laying bare her soul's hideous and inveterate wound, significantly rejoins, "Thou hast said well, 'I have no husband', for thou hast had five husbands, and He whom Thou now hast is not thy husband". Alas! impure sinner that she was, how could she know the gift of God? . . .

No matter, long and deeply as she has sinned, yet, if her repentance be sincere, all shall be pardoned. She has offended much; let her love much!* . . . The revelation of her iniquities has not been without its effect. It has gained the victory over years of obduracy. She "inclines not her heart to evil words to make excuses in sins";† on the contrary, she recognizes the power of Him who speaks to her. "Lord, I perceive that

* Luke, vii. 47.

† Ps., cxl. 4.

'Thou art a prophet—*Domine, video quia propheta es tu !*"

But if her heart needed purifying, her mind also needed enlightenment. Whether from the heretical spirit of her sect, or from an intuitive desire to cast off that misery of doubt in which schism had involved her countrymen, her newly-dawning religious ideas take, it would seem, the shape of controversy. "Our fathers", she goes on to say, "adored on this mountain; and you say that Jerusalem is the place where men must adore". See how far she still is from knowing the gift of God!

Jesus, however, like the good shepherd, who keeps in sight His lost sheep, and follows it alike through the piercing brambles and the perplexing wilderness—Jesus disdains not to instruct that poor soul, whom His mercy has already called to repentance. Opening the eyes of her understanding in His own light to see light,* at once He sets

* Ps., xxxv. 10.

before her those two great fundamental principles of Christianity—its universality and its spirituality—"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when you shall neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem adore the Father. The hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorer shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. God is a spirit, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth".

With docility the Samaritan listens to this sublime language. Her mind expands to the light, even as her heart had already yielded to contrition. As she had recognized a prophet in the revealer of her hidden iniquities, so now in her instructor she discovers the Doctor of the nations. And since without faith in the Messiah no one can be justified—since without faith it is impossible to please God, or to receive the gift of God—assisted by divine grace, she falters not; but, speaking no less for believing Israel than for that Gentile world of

which she is the figure—to the confusion of incredulous Judaism through all time to come, she proclaims in open day that dogma which, with her whole nation, she had traditionally received—"I know that the Messiah cometh, who is called Christ; therefore, when He is come, He will tell us all things".

It was for this profession of faith that our Lord, it would seem, had been waiting all along. He hears it, and at once manifests Himself:—"That Messiah, that Christ, that Doctor of the nations—I who speak with thee am He". Oh, soul supremely blest! At last she knows the gift of God; she possesses it, and it shall not be taken from her!

V.

Let us now again apply our inspired narrative to the case of those poor worldly souls whose likeness we have found in the woman of Samaria, and who too often oppose to the gift of God the same obstacles of heart and mind that we have observed in her.

The heart of the worldly, even though it be not entirely perverted, is rarely, if ever, sufficiently pure to desire or to enjoy the sweets of the Eucharistic banquet. "He that loveth cleanness of heart shall have the King for his friend".* "Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? or who shall rest on Thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice; he that speaketh truth in his heart, who hath not used deceit in his tongue".† "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"‡ Such is the voice of inspiration; but the world abandons itself to profane pleasures; it permits self-love and the senses to domineer; it abounds in those vices which gave our Lord cause to say, "Wo to the world because of scandals".§ How then can it love the Eucharist? "What concord hath Christ with Belial! What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"|| Who can

* Prov., xxii. 11. † Ps., xiv. 1. ‡ Matt., v. 8.

§ Matt., xviii. 7. || II. Cor., vi. 16.

drink at the same time from the chalice of the Lord and the chalice of devils?

But this is not all. As the heart of the world is impure, so, too, its intellect is at once obscured by depravities, and the sport of vanity. Truth, like God Himself, can be seen only by the pure in heart. To the spirit of the world the spirit of the Gospel is simply incomprehensible. He who regulates his life by worldly maxims finds the doctrine of Christ a sealed book; and his understanding, thus left without any trustworthy guide, wanders at random from error into doubt, from doubt into indifference. It cannot know the gift of God.

Such are the obstacles which the world opposes to Christianity; and what is their divinely appointed remedy? The history on which we are engaged supplies us with an answer.

As, then, Jesus, in His poor, condescends to ask alms from the world, so too, in the person of His priests, He daily presents Himself before it to make known and impart to

it the gift of God. In their person He takes His seat, as of yore by Jacob's well—that is to say, at those fountains of grace, the sacred pulpit, or the tribunal of penance; and there He patiently waits for any poor Samaritan who may chance to draw nigh.

Oh, ye worldly souls, whoever ye be! when, passing along in search, perhaps, of terrestrial waters, you come across the priest of Jesus, thus seated at the well of divine truth, stay and listen, as did the Samaritan of old. He will not, indeed, with Jesus, read at one glance the bottom of your consciences; but he will at least deal patiently with you; and when you make to him the avowal of your transgressions—when, at last you break that silence of long years, which has so aggravated the guilt of your sins, and delayed its remission, he will greet you with such paternal tenderness, he will show so much sympathy, so wise will be his advice, so exactly what you need his consolations, so illuminating the rays he will shed upon

your darkness—that you will almost feel inclined to say with her of Samaria, “I perceive thou art a prophet”. And, oh, how truly will he prove himself to you a prophet in the noblest sense of the word! For then will he whisper into the ears of your heart that saving truth which he has received no less for you than for himself—then will he instruct you in our divine precepts, so compassionate even in their severity—then will he preach to you the Cross, so wise even in its foolishness—then will he impart to you our mysteries, obscure for no other reason than because they are above the level of human intelligence, and on a plain with God’s. More than all, then will he initiate you in that mystery of mysteries, the Eucharist.

“For eighteen centuries past”, he will say, “has that hour come, and now is, in which the true adorers worship in spirit and in truth their Incarnate God. He it was who, on the eve of His death, took bread and

wine, and blessed them, and said, ‘This is my Body’; ‘This is my Blood’; and still, wherever Mass is said—wherever a tabernacle is found, throughout the wide world, there does the same God and Saviour, ineffably present, offer Himself to the adoration of His faithful”.

Ah, poor child of the world! I am not without hope that, repentant, instructed, absolved, you may yet find yourself one day kneeling before the altar of your God, and saying in the faith of your heart, “I know that the divine Messiah, the Saviour of the world, is there”. And oh, with such dispositions be not afraid to approach yet nearer, and to receive into your heart Him whom you have adored! And when returning homewards you experience a joy unknown before, a peace which you thought had fled for ever, an inexpressible felicity, that shall seem an antepast of heaven, you will feel no astonishment, but will say within yourself, “It is because I have learnt the gift of God”

VI.

While, however we thus indulge a hope for many a poor worldly soul, for the world itself, on the contrary, we can feel but apprehension and dismay.

When Jesus said to the woman of Samaria—"Didst thou but know the gift of God !" faithful to the divine impulse, she responded to that tender appeal, and quickly came to understand the hidden mystery ; but I find in the holy Gospel another sentence of our Lord's, which, with a certain resemblance to the former, partakes not of its hopefulness, but rather fills the heart with an inexpressible sadness. It is that which Jesus uttered so pathetically over Jerusalem a short time before His passion :—"Oh, Jerusalem ! Jerusalem ! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and thou

wouldst not!"* "If thou hadst but known in this thy day, the things that are for thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes!"†

"If thou hadst but known the things that are for thy peace!" What is this but to say, "Hadst thou but known the gift of God"?

Far different, however, was the conduct of Jerusalem from that of the poor daughter of Samaria. When Jesus, wearied out with His life's toilsome journey, paused at last, so to say, on the hill of Calvary, and there from the cross, yet once again, as before at Jacob's well, complained of thirst, Jerusalem, instead of water, gives Him vinegar and gall; instead of confessing Him a prophet, blindfolds Him, and smiting Him on the face, exclaims, "Prophecy who is it that struck thee!" and, instead of acknowledging in Him the Messias, she utters the audacious cry, "If thou art the Christ, come down from the cross!"

* Matt., xxiii. 37.

† Luke, xix. 42.

It was in the clear foresight of its rejection of Him that our dear Lord, as He stood gazing on that unhappy city, wept indeed over it tears of pity; but His justice none the less pronounced that awful sentence of condemnation—"The day shall come upon thee when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation!"

Oh, world! world! which example wilt thou follow—that of Jerusalem or that of the Samaritan? Ah, how oft has Jesus wished to gather thy children together under His divine wings; but thou wouldst not! How oft has He offered thee the gift of peace, and thou hast flung it back! But take care! The time of vengeance is at hand! Seest thou not how the armies of the enemy encompass and beleaguer thee? Seest thou not how they menace all thou holdest dearest and most sacred? Alas! in thy society, undermined and tottering to its fall, hardly

will they leave one stone upon another !
Decide, then, and take thy choice : choose
between the gift of God and slavery ; choose
between the gift of God and destruction ;
choose between the gift of God and barba-
rism. Oh, world ! world ! still wilt thou
hesitate ? Shalt thou never be brought to
know—to prefer—to appreciate—the gift
of God ?

Seventh Meditation.

THE HIDDEN GOD.

Vere tu es Deus absconditus, Deus Salvator.

Verily thou art a hidden God, O God, our Saviour!

Is., xlv. 15.

I.

AMONG the mysteries of redemption, one there is, the obscurest of all, and the most attractive of all. Dark as profoundest midnight, it, nevertheless, floods the soul with a delicious brightness, *Nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis*:* an abyss of impenetrable silence, it has an eloquence, notwithstanding, sweeter than honey or the honeycomb, *Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua super mel et favum*:† presenting to the eye of sense an exterior suggestive but of lifelessness and inaction, it never-

* Ps., cxxxviii. 11.

† Ps., xviii. 11.

theless contains within it a life so divine, that its recipient cannot help exclaiming, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that live thin me, *Vivo jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus!*"*

This mystery, so lovely, so awful; you have already divined it. It is the most Holy Eucharist. And how sublimely at once, and pointedly, does the great evangelical prophet announce it, in those words which stand at the head of our meditation: *Vere tu es Deus absconditus, Deus Salvator*, Verily thou art a hidden God, O God, our Saviour!

But in proportion as this divine Saviour hides His glory, so does the faithful soul, on the other hand, desire to penetrate those mysterious depths. The profounder the darkness that enshrouds His eucharistic presence, the more do we delight to adorn His tabernacle with flowers and sparkling lights, and to beautify the place of His

* Gal., ii. 20.

sanctuary with gems and gold. The more hushed, the more abysmal the silence in which He dwells, so much the more do we seek to offer Him the homage of our lips and to environ His altar with hymns and canticles. The deeper the verities which His sacramental existence involves, so much the more do we yearn to impart them to every mind and heart.

Lord, I come this day, like a little child, nourished on Thy hidden bread, and on the pure milk of Thy word, to ask of Thee in all humility, for what cause Thou hast buried so rare a gift in such a depth of unsearchableness? wherefore such mystery in this food so sweet, wherefore such sweetness in this mystery so obscure?

Jesus Himself, methinks, makes answer from His tabernacle. "*Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim, quia decoloravit me sol*, Do not consider my darkness, for the sun hath discoloured me", the sun,—that is to say, the ardour of love, as St. Bernard

explains it, *Decolorari a sole est ignescere charitate.*

Yes; it is most true. Love, and love alone, O Jesus! induces Thee thus to bury in silence and darkness the splendours of Thy glory. But suffer me to ask again, wherefore should Thy love choose for itself this mysterious concealment? Ah, Lord, Thou repliest not. Thou willest rather that we should answer this question for ourselves. And, oh! how much might each find in the bottom of his heart from whence to make that answer! Thy love to him, as exhibited in this all-sacred gift,—the reasons so full of tenderness and compassion that prompt Thee thus to dispense it to him in so hidden a manner,—are not these things perpetually in his thoughts; are they not his constant theme of praise and thanksgiving; the deepest, the dearest secret of his soul?

I, too, the least of Thy little ones, have had my musings, and would say something

with Thy permission. And, oh! may my words be not the mere expression of my own ideas, but an echo from the secret depths of a thousand loving hearts.

II.

Among the causes, then, which may prompt our dear Lord thus mysteriously to shroud His awful presence, methinks I discover in particular these three. He conceals Himself in the Holy Eucharist, as it seems to me, first, in order to dwell more intimately within us; secondly, in order to act upon us more efficaciously; lastly, in order by, and through us, to be again revealed.

First, Jesus hides Himself in the most Holy Eucharist, in order to dwell more intimately within us.

Union with God is the great final cause of the moral world, and the sole thing that gives elevation to the human race. Isolated from God, what is man? At once

all his greatness and glory disappear. There remains but a body, which, like the grass of the field, flowers in the morning, and at noon lies withered and dead,—a life evanescent as vapour,—a soul that scintillates for a moment, and is gone into darkness. On the other hand, united with God he is a being of sublimest dignity; his soul is the very image of Divinity; and his body, with all its organs and senses, is that soul's faithful and docile minister, subserving it in the development of its varied faculties. The closest mutual ties link him with the bountiful Author of all existence. He proceeds from God; he returns to God; in God is his origin, in God his end; and his present earthly life is but a transition between these two points, if two they can be called:—it is a progress from God to God!

To abide in constant union with Him, from whom he comes, and to whom he goes, such is obviously the first duty of a

being thus circumstanced; and God meanwhile shows His immense paternal goodness towards man, His creature, in supernaturally assisting that gracious union; in leading him back to it, when he departs from it; and in drawing it yet closer and closer by the inventions of His love. What, indeed, is the history of religion but a long record of these merciful devices?

From the very beginning of the world the Eternal Word enters into relationship with man. He informs his understanding, enkindles his heart, instructs him in all that he is to believe and to do; nevertheless, He comes not down to dwell with him. He remains apart in the bosom of the Eternal Father, high above human reach. Far from uniting himself to man, as the hidden bread of life, He is rather the dread voice that "upheaves the desert, and breaketh the cedars".* He is that God of whom it is written, "the Lord is great and exceedingly to

* Ps., xxviii. 5.

be praised; He is to be feared above all gods".*

But this satisfied not the love of the All-merciful. He willed to come down, and live in the midst of those whom He had made; He willed to become Incarnate—to become man! Ah, how much closer is this second tie, and, at the same time, how sweetly adapted to our necessities! For in His Incarnation God at once hides Himself from us, and draws near to us. Had He drawn near, yet not concealed Himself, our feeble nature had withered before the blaze of His majesty. Had He concealed Himself, and kept apart from us, never should we have known or loved Him as He is! But, O most divine compassion! at once He hides Himself and He draws nigh. He hides Himself beneath a human form; and, permitted to gaze on His glory, I rejoice under the shadow of His wings! He draws nigh, and, attracted by His loveliness,

* Ps., xcvi. 4.

my soul flies to His embrace. *In "vèlamente alarum tuarum exsultabo: adhæsit anima mea post te".**

Oh, sacred and most mystical veils of the Incarnation! Oh, adorable body of my Saviour! Oh, divine hands stretched out to save me! Oh, divine feet so wearied in seeking me! Oh, sacred Heart that has so much loved me! how dear are ye to my soul!

"The Lord", says St. Bernard, "was great and exceedingly to be praised; in becoming man He made Himself little, and exceedingly to be loved, *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis*". Yes: when I behold Him in His first infant sleep at Bethlehem, on Mary's bosom, He seems to me less, so to say, than in His ineffable generation—and for this cause I love Him. When I behold Him toiling at Joseph's side in the workshop at Nazareth, He seems to me less than as building the fabric of the universe—and

* Ps., lxi. 9.

for this cause I love Him. When I behold Him served by Martha, and adored by Mary in the house of Lazarus, He seems to me less than as inhabiting the heavens, attended by angels, worshipped by seraphim—and for this cause I love Him. When I behold Him sad and suffering in His Passion, extended on a cross, and dying in torments, He seems to me less than as living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever—and for this cause I love Him! *Parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis!*

And now one would imagine that the lowest point of divine condescension had been reached. “How shall God”, it might be said, “thus profoundly hidden already in His Incarnation, discover a yet deeper concealment? Or again, brought thus near to us by taking a body and soul like our own, how shall He contrive to approach us nearer still?”

Nevertheless, He with whom all things

are possible, effects even this seeming impossibility; and it is the last device of His love. He hides Himself from me under the appearance of Bread; He draws so near to me as to become my very food! He makes Himself still less than before, and as such the object of my love in a yet intenser degree;—less under the species of bread than in the form of man,—less in the Tabernacle than at Bethlehem,—less on the altar than upon the cross,—less still, yea least of all, when He enters my heart in holy communion. My heart! it is the cradle in which He sleeps, the workshop in which He labours, the territory which he inhabits, the Calvary where He dies a victim, the sepulchre in which He is buried.—And oh, how little has He made Himself in order to enter therein! There accordingly it is that I love Him most of all.

And let me recollect that this divine union is no peculiar gift confined to a favoured few. To all who approach His

holy table, Jesus offers the participation of Himself. His mortal life, circumscribed within a narrow locality, lasted but three and thirty years. His Eucharistic life extends from pole to pole, and continues to the world's end. During the former, but a small number of persons, comparatively, beheld Him, enjoyed His presence, received Him into their homes. The latter is the heirloom of all mankind. Age after age generations come and go; and as in never-failing succession they fill and refill the world, still evermore do they find the God of the Eucharist present upon earth, in the ubiquitous tabernacle of His love, hiding Himself thus profoundly, only in order to unite Himself with us the more intimately.

III.

Secondly, our Lord hides Himself in the holy Eucharist, in order to act upon us with greater efficaciousness.

When Jesus comes to us, He comes not for His own sake, but for ours. He comes to do a work in us. Our heart is for Him no solitary throne where He may sit and rest. If He visits it, it is in order to better, to purify, to transform it. And now let us see how it comes to pass that His Eucharistic presence so wonderfully subserves this merciful purpose.

There is a vast difference between God's mode of action on the soul and man's. Man in general acts upon his fellow-man by exterior means, and the more potent these are, the greater his influence. God, on the contrary, acts interiorly, and the more interior His action, the greater its energy and efficacy. It is true He brings to bear upon man certain exterior influences, such as the outward spectacle of His creation, the course of human events, the power of His divine word, holy examples, and the like; but these exterior instruments avail not to the soul's profit, except

when they are animated and vivified by a divine interior action.

This action is His grace; and since it has pleased His infinite wisdom and goodness to deposit the richest treasures of His grace in the most Holy Eucharist, hence, among all the means of grace, the Eucharist is necessarily the most efficacious. This, accordingly, it is that has ever been the great vivifying source of sanctification to the Church. This it is that has produced in all ages martyrs, confessors, virgins. This it is that still unfailingly supplies, as from an inexhaustible fount, the rarest gifts of God. This it is that at once maintains the ordinary sanctity of Christian life, and nourishes the most heroic virtues; while from beneath its mysterious veils there issues forth a divine though voiceless eloquence, instructing us in the sublimest virtues, and imparting secrets too profound for words.

Answer for me, all ye devout and saintly souls whose joy is in the altar of your Lord !

To you I appeal. Before you knew the Eucharist, what knew ye of divine things as they should be known? And since you have known it, wherein are ye ignorant? Before you were inebriated with the wine that beareth virgins, knew ye aught of chastity? Before you had eaten of that mysterious bread in which Deity annihilates Itself, knew ye aught of humility? Before you were united with the Divine Victim of Calvary, knew ye aught of patience? Before you had participated in the Feast of love, knew ye aught of charity? Whereas, since the Eucharist has become your daily food, with what readiness have your minds opened to the inspirations of truth! what delight have you experienced in the practice of the evangelical counsels; what surpassing interest in tracing, though from afar, those lofty paths of perfection by which the saints have ascended from virtue to virtue! Ah! baptism has made us Christians; confirmation has made us per-

fect Christians; but the Holy Eucharist alone will make us saints.

And then, again, how gentle is its teaching! how facile, how graceful does it render the accomplishment of all our duties! The soul that has been taught by Jesus in the Holy Eucharist may be recognized almost at first sight.

In short, one would at times be tempted to think that there were two kinds of Christianity—one in which the yoke is always painful, the burden heavy, the commandments laborious—another in which the burden is ever light, the yoke easy, and the very counsels no toil. The first is the Christianity of those who know not the Eucharist; the second that of its lovers and devout frequenters.

Let there be two souls, one of which loves the sacrament of the altar, while the other is indifferent towards it. Set before them the same commandment, the same counsel, the same virtue, the same work.

You will see that where the first falters, the second is firm ; that where the former creeps, the latter will fly ; that where the one is shipwrecked, the other will advance full sail, and gain the haven. Such is the power of the Eucharist ; such its prolific energy in the diffusion of interior grace. O God, our Saviour ! how truly art thou a God that hidest thyself ! *Deus absconditus, Deus Salvator !*

IV.

Lastly, Jesus hides Himself from us in the Blessed Sacrament, in order by and through us to be again revealed.

The Eucharist, as we have so often had occasion to repeat, is a mystery—a mystery profoundly unsearchable, and utterly surpassing human intelligence. Nothing but a vivid faith can pierce its dense obscurity, and beneath the appearance of bread discern the Eternal. But side by side with its concealment I discover also a revelation. Jesus, it is true, hides Himself beneath the

veil of the Sacrament, but it is in order to be revealed anew through the instrumentality of those who receive Him! He appears, it is true, to annihilate Himself, but it is only that He may live a second life in the holy lives of His faithful, risen again in Him, and may multiply in the person of every individual Christian the manifestation of His works.

To unite us with Himself, to make us partakers of the divine nature, this it was that brought Jesus down from heaven. He willed by a sublime condescension to transfuse into us His own being—to perpetuate in us Himself; so that as the whole race of mankind is a repetition of the first Adam, in whom all have sinned, in like manner, He, the new Adam, might be continued visibly in the Christian generations by Him redeemed and sanctified. Now, it is chiefly by means of the most Holy Eucharist that our dearest Lord attains this most beneficent end.

“There is this difference”, says a holy father, “between the material bread that nourishes the body, and the Eucharistic food. The former, inferior in dignity to its recipient, becomes converted into his substance; the latter, superior in nature to the being into whom it enters, draws him, so to say, towards itself, and transforms him into itself”. The material bread, in other words, becomes a portion of ourselves; the spiritual bread, on the contrary, makes us each another Christ. *Christianus alter Christus.*

But from this consideration there results an important consequence. Jesus, as we have seen, conceals Himself for our sake in the most Holy Eucharist. What, then, becomes our duty in turn? Surely, transformed by its means into His second selves, it remains for us to reveal Him again to the world by a life after the pattern of His own.

Neither is it difficult to see in what part

ticulars this revelation on our part must consist. We have but to consider what elements of our Lord's life, as manifested upon earth, are withdrawn in the Eucharist from view; and in the devout exhibition precisely of these will our duty as Christians be found to lie.

Now, when Jesus was upon earth, His divine life manifested itself to the world in three ways; in His exterior appearance—in His words—in His actions. But in the holy Eucharist all these are withdrawn. In the Holy Eucharist our Lord presents to the senses neither exterior appearance of His own, nor audible speech, nor visible act. It is for us, then, as His living images, to exhibit these in ourselves, that, as the apostle says, "the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal bodies".*

And first there is the exterior appearance of our dear Lord—a vision so sweet, so entrancingly lovely, that to express the Incar-

* II. Cor., iv. 10.

nation St. Paul could but say, "*Benignitas apparuit*—Benignity hath appeared".* Jesus had only to show Himself, and a certain ineffable charm at once attracted all who beheld Him. A single glance of that divine eye sufficed to draw apostles after Him, and to touch the hardest hearts with repentance. So gracious and winning were His manners that the common accusation against Him was that of being a seducer of the people.

Ah ! would the gift were ours to exhibit in ourselves, in our demeanour, in our every movement, in our looks, in our very features, that sweet exterior of our dear Saviour, so that the mere sight of us might cause the world to exclaim, "*Benignitas apparuit!*" And surely the piety of a soul devoted to the Eucharist ought to be of a character peculiarly lovely. Surely an all-graceful modesty should be its attractive attire, inveigling every heart to God ; surely everywhere and at all times there should breathe

* Tit., iii. 4.

around it that perfume of virtues which is the good odour of Christ.*

But, further, it should be our aim to reproduce in ourselves not only the exterior appearance, but also the language, and even the very words of Jesus—those words whose vibrations have changed the world—which have been to the understanding the announcement of the highest intellectual truth, and to the heart an expression of the most sublime morality. The Eucharist has no voice; its best eloquence is silence—a silence that speaks indeed, but speaks interiorly. To us, its recipients, is left the task of sounding forth over the world the syllabled words of our divine Master. Priests and people, we are all alike, apostles. We all owe to the souls of our brethren that sympathetic utterance of Christian faith and hope, which, issuing from a sincere heart, conveys to our neighbour such inexpressible consolation and encouragement.

• II. Cor., ii. 15.

Still, I deny not that to the priest in particular is confided the ministry of Christ's word; I admit it fully. But while I admit it, I thank the divine mercy for having constituted him at the same time the minister of the Eucharist also. Yes: if the priest is able day after day unerringly to dispense the treasures of sacred doctrine, it is because day after day he ascends the altar of his Lord. If he is the faithful interpreter of God's moral law, it is because he so often holds that same God in his hands! If he preaches the Gospel of Jesus from a pure heart, it is because the Eucharist—that burning coal of Isaias—is upon his lips!

Finally, it is our office as Christians, and especially as devout lovers of the Eucharist, to reproduce the actions of Jesus.

The most Holy Sacrament contains within it an Incarnate God, whose whole life was an active manifestation of most marvellous virtues. But in the Eucharist there is no outward action; all is interior—all is

hidden. Virtues, indeed, there are—virtues most perfect, most admirable; but they are withdrawn from human gaze. Nevertheless, they wait to be revealed; and we are their revealers. It is for us to display them to the world, by deeds conformable in their measure to those of Jesus when He lived amongst men. It suffices not that our own souls be sanctified, the world also must see our good works, that it may glorify our Father who is in heaven.*

Holy Scripture supplies me with language that conveys the idea I wish to express far better than any words of my own: —“It is good to hide the secret of a king, but honourable to reveal and confess the works of God”.†

“The secret of a king”—that is to say, the Eucharist. Ah! let us preserve it carefully—let us keep it as a possession inexpressibly dear to us, in the very bottom of our hearts; let us shrink from exposing to

* Matt., v. 16.

† Tob., xii. 7.

the broad glare this delicate flower that so loves the shade, lest it lose aught of its fragrance. But, at the same time, let us remember that if it is good to hide this secret of the King of kings, it is honourable to reveal the works of God; it is honourable—nay, more, it is our obligation—to set forth in our daily life the works of Him who has left us an example that we should follow His steps.* Oft, then, as we return from the Holy Table, let the life of Christ glow forth in us anew; let it be displayed in brighter and brighter tints.

Oh, how important a point is this! and how I wish it were more frequently the subject of our thoughts! The Eucharist is a hidden mystery; the life and virtues of each individual Christian are its revelation. A man may not believe—may not see in the Sacrament of the Altar anything more than a piece of material bread—yet may he, nevertheless, be constrained to acknowledge

* I. Pet., ii. 21,

and to adore the presence of God in those who receive that Sacrament; and it is for us to effect this. Astonished to observe in each one of us a goodness, severe only to itself, indulgent to others—an unalterable sweetness—an ardent charity—he must be forced to say: “Here is another Jesus, a Jesus not wrapt in concealment, but such as He appeared to the world!”

V.

Oh, let us love more and more this sacred mystery, since it unites us so closely to our hidden God. Let us rejoice to partake of it, since it acts so efficaciously within our souls. But, above all, never let us forget that, in proportion as Jesus hides and annihilates Himself in it, in the same proportion we are bound to exhibit in ourselves His own divine life. *Christianus alter Christus.* The Christian is another Christ.

So shall that divine Saviour, whom we

have manifested in our lives upon earth, reveal Himself to us and in us, as our everlasting reward, by the gift of His glory in the skies. Amen.

Eighth Meditation.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Fame pereō.

I perish with hunger.

LUKE, xv. 17.

I.

WHAT Christian soul has not mused again and again over the touching parable of the prodigal? Who of us has not wept over his wanderings, and rejoiced at his happy return? Above all, who has not thanked Jesus from the bottom of his heart for this His own beautiful story, in which He so sweetly teaches sinners repentance, and those to whom they apply indulgence and compassion?

I was myself but now meditating on this affecting history, at the foot, let me say, of the tabernacle; and as I mused, and asked myself whence had proceeded this youth's misery, and traced it back, step by

step, to his first abandonment of his father's modest table in search of luxuries better suited to his carnal appetite; and then heard his cry of anguish, "I perish with hunger"; and then, again, saw how his father received him back with joy and feasting;—ah! as these pictures, one by one, rose before me, each with its mystical allusion to the food of eternal life; how could I fail of discerning the divine Eucharist peering forth, so to say, from beneath the veil of this lovely allegory?

Nay, dearest Lord—shall I say it? whenever I peruse Thy Holy Scriptures, this Sacrament of Thy love is perpetually in my mind and in my heart. My favourite passages are those which refer to it; in every page I open, my first glance is directed in search of it—or rather, search is not necessary, for everywhere it confronts me; each leaf of the inspired volume is to me a sheet, so to say, of transparent crystal, through which the Eucharist glistens.

II.

Let me try to unfold the thoughts which, as I mused but now on the story of the poor prodigal, this ever-present image suggested to my mind.

“A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father: ‘Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me’. And he divided unto them his substance. And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country”.

Before we follow him on this long and miserable journey, let us first picture him to ourselves in his father’s house. . . . Ah! how was it he failed of being happy there? For in that blessed home, as appears from what is said further on in the parable, he was ever with his father, and all that his father had was his. There the very hirelings had bread in abundance; and if the hirelings, how much more the sons!

That blessed paternal home! I ask myself what it typifies, and at once there occurs to my mind the well-known passage in the Book of Proverbs:—"Wisdom hath built herself a house; she hath hewn her out seven pillars. She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table, and hath said, 'Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you'".* O sacred home, over which divine Wisdom presides! and whose table, ever spread, is nothing less than the most Holy Eucharist! There, in deed and in truth, is our hunger satiated—not with the bread of hirelings, but with the food of angels; there, in the bosom of our true Father, we enjoy peace and delightful repose; there all that He has, all that He is, is ours!

III.

But with all this the younger son is not satisfied; and accordingly he asks his father

* Prov., ix. 1.

to give him his portion of substance, with the view of seeking happiness elsewhere.

Strictly speaking, no portion was his by right; for what have we that we have not received* from the mere bounty of a God who owes nothing to His creatures? Yet, in a limited sense, it is most true that every Christian soul has its heritage; and this heritage, I would add, consists of two portions.

Of these, the first comprises all purely natural goods, as, for instance, those which constitute our being, the soul and body, with their faculties; then, in the intellectual order, the sciences and arts; and then, again, in the social order, rank, fortune, enjoyments, honours, and the like. This is the portion which the world chooses, and which God consents to let it have; and this, too, it was that the father in the parable so easily relinquished to his son.

But there is another portion far different

* I. Cor., iv. 7.

from this—the treasures of divine grace—that portion concerning which the Royal Prophet says, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup”.* Of my cup!—as much as to say, the inheritance which I have received of the Lord, and which I value above all things, is His chalice—that chalice which inebriateth me, and how goodly is it!†—the chalice of the Eucharist. Ah, but this portion—the most excellent, the most precious, by far—the world disdains it! The younger son dreams not of asking for it!

And now he has gone his way; he is on his road to that far country, which is the world; the farther off in proportion as it is farther removed from Jesus. He enters that world, and success attends his steps. Wealthy, powerful, endowed with the lavish gifts of art and science; fortunate in his terrestrial affections; elated with the enjoyments as with the pride of life; who could

* Ps., xv. 5.

† Ps., xxii. 5.

suppose anything wanting to his happiness? One thing, however, there is still wanting—one thing alone—but it is the one thing necessary!*—the bread of the soul, its daily bread, that bread which he has renounced. And so when, as time goes on, his riches fail, his power crumbles to the dust, his vain earthly philosophy leaves him with a blank abyss at his feet; his fond human affections prove an empty mockery, and his enjoyments a passing dream! then, perceiving all he had boasted in to be but vanity of vanities, he is obliged to confess that what enfeebles him, what disheartens him, what devours him, is not the loss of riches, of power, of pleasure, of friendship, of love, but the loss of this divine bread: “I am perishing”, he says, “with hunger—*Fame pereō!*”

There is a thought, however, that brings comfort. The world is around him—the great world, so wealthy, so powerful, so

* Luke, x. 42.

wise, so honoured, so adored. Let him apply to it. He does so; but, alas! what he has not, neither has the world any more than he; and that which enfeebles him, disheartens him, devours him, is devouring also the world! "There came", says the parable, "a mighty famine in that country—*Facta est fames valida in regione illa*". Everywhere is heard his own cry, "*Fame pereo*".

Oh, how sad, yet how true, a picture is this! Is there not, even down to the present day, a famine over the earth? Wherever, indeed, the Church of God exists—wherever the Catholic Faith is maintained—wherever fervent hearts are yet found—there the Bread of Life is distributed abundantly; but what is this in comparison with the whole world? "*Hæc quid sunt inter tantos?*" What are these among so many?"* What vast provinces, what immense continents, yet remain, where the Bread of Life is never broken—where

* John, vi. 9.

never priest utters—"This is my Body, this is my Blood"! How many noble kingdoms, overspread with pernicious heresies, does the Light of the Sanctuary, but scantily illumine, like a light glimmering in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not! Their populations may be wealthy—may be powerful—may enjoy innumerable advantages of art and nature—may possess an abundance, nay, an excess, of all material gifts—yet, nevertheless, are they dying of hunger. The famine of the soul devours them. Destitute of that Divine fatness,* that sacred, life-giving substance, the most Holy Eucharist, their enfeebled spiritual nature faints and fails to nought in all that pertains to charity, to chastity, to humility, to the Christian graces, to the true moral elevation of individuals or of peoples!

Oh! faithful and fervent lovers of the Eucharist, be you my witnesses! Declare

* Psalm, lxii. 6.

and say, is not its privation a destroying famine? To you, to enjoy your Lord in His Holy Sacrament is to live; to lose Him, what would it be but death? Though your lot be the deepest poverty, nevertheless with the Eucharist you enjoy abundance; without it, though rich as Croesus in worldly goods, you would be reduced to exclaim for veriest indigence—" *Fame pereo*,—I perish with hunger".

IV.

And now observe the sorrowful extremity to which our prodigal is brought. He is condemned by sheer starvation to hire himself out to "a citizen of that country", who sets him to the meanest of occupations: and all his ambition is centred in gathering for his food "the husks the swine did eat".

A fearful punishment, surely! and one so profound in its mystical import, that it cannot be too deeply impressed upon us.

For by this our Divine Lord seems to teach us, that for the human soul there exist in reality but two kinds of food,—the Eucharist, or the leavings of the swine! Yes; and so must it inevitably be. To a being such as man, there belongs no medium. Heaven, or the loathsome sty! the bread of angels, or the foul aliment of vicious pleasures! needs must he choose, one or the other; and the reason of this is, that his present condition being that of a creature at once fallen and regenerated—fallen in Adam, regenerated in Christ—man must ever be, so to say, either above or below himself; above himself, by the supernatural aid of Divine grace; below himself, by yielding to his own sinful tendencies, the fruit of original sin. Sustained aloft on the pinions of the former, he soars heavenwards like the eagle; weighed down by the latter, he wallows in the filth with unclean beasts. And hence it comes to pass (as we all know, and

oh, how well!) that while we remain in faithful and Christian obedience to God's law, mere material bread no longer satisfies us, no longer can we live by it alone; transformed into the likeness of angels, we may say with Raphael, that—"we appear, indeed, to eat and to drink with men, but that our real food is a nourishment invisible to mortal eye".* On the other hand, when a Christian falls from grace, when he abandons the law of God, and gives way to sin, let him not deceive himself with the notion that he can maintain a middle ground. Needs must he retreat or advance. Some food or other he must find for the hunger that tears him; and if that food be not spiritual, it will be sensual. He has begun by forsaking his Heavenly Father; sooner or later he will be constrained to beg at the door of a merciless tyrant, and to feed himself on the leavings of the swine!

* Tob., xii. 19.

V.

So much for the guilt and misery of the poor prodigal: let us now contemplate his happy recovery.

Touched by Divine grace, he returns to himself; and observe, the first thought that rises in his mind is directed towards that Divine Bread which he had so recklessly abandoned. "How many hired servants in my father's house", he says, "have plenty of bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son".

I know not how others may feel, but for my own part, I must confess myself to have the greatest confidence in the dispositions of that soul, whose first accent of repentance expresses regret for the loss of the Divine Eucharist, and a holy envy of

those who enjoy it as their daily food. How assured do I feel that the poor sinner will seek his Father with confidence, if his first desire be the Bread of Life! How assured am I of the contrition with which he will say, "Father, I have sinned", if but he hopes by that contrition to prepare himself for Holy Communion! How certain am I of his humility in saying, "I am not worthy", when he utters those words kneeling before the Altar of his God! A boundless confidence, a sincere contrition, a profound humility—such, most certainly, are the conditions of a true repentance; but the Eucharist, in a special manner, confirms and invigorates these dispositions. That God whom it contains, at once encourages us by His benignity, touches our hearts by His holiness, subdues us by His majesty; and if the mere desire of receiving Him stirs up all that is best within us, how much more His actual reception!

Neither is it surely a small triumph of

the Blessed Eucharist, that it brings such vast multitudes to the great Sacrament of Penance itself. Ever as solemn fast and festival come round, we see crowds of penitents pressing forward; they kneel at the sacred tribunals, they smite their breasts, and with the prodigal exclaim, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child". Whence this compunction? whence this humble confession of their guilt? It comes of their desire for that celestial food whose privation is death. They, too, have said within themselves, "How many are there, the poorest of the poor, who find, nevertheless, in the house of their Father and their God, bread in abundance, while I perish with hunger!" And this thought has been their salvation. It has led them back again into the way of life; it has brought them to a holy confession; their souls have been absolved, purified, justified; and it is hard to determine

which has had most share in the work—the fervour of their contrition, or their eager longing for the Eucharistic banquet.

VI.

Impelled, then, no less by sincere repentance, than by an intense craving for the Bread of Life, our prodigal arises and goes to his Father. “And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him”. Then, touched by his son’s ingenuous confession of his errors, “he called his servants, and said to them, ‘Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead and is come to life again, he was lost and is found’, and they began to be merry”.

Oh! let us dwell on this affecting picture; but let us set the type aside, and contemplate the reality. Who, then, is this Father of the prodigal but Thou Thyself, O Jesus! my Lord and my God? Yes! Thou art the true Father of our souls; Thou who, when we were afar off, didst come and preach to us the Gospel of peace;*—Thou who, before time was, didst behold us with an eye of compassion, and when we lay fast bound in the chains of Adam, didst draw us to Thee with the cords of love;—Thou who, to reach us, traversing space like a giant, glancing over the hills, and leaping the eternal mountains, didst come down from heaven to earth; and to overtake us and save us in the very midst of our sins, didst speed from Bethlehem to Nazareth, from Nazareth to Cana, from Cana to Capharnaum, to Samaria, to where-soever guilt or misery was to be found;—

* Eph., ii. 17.

Thou who, enfolding poor human nature in Thy divine embrace, didst give it that kiss of mercy and of peace which gladdens it yet;—Thou, finally, who having died a victim for us on Calvary, didst will to become our food and our feast at the Eucharistic Table; and for all Thou hast done for us, for all Thou hast suffered for us, askest no other reward than to be able to say of us, “These my children were dead and are alive again, they were lost and are found”.

Oh! how delightful the thought of that reconciliation, which begins before all ages in the love of the Eternal Word; which is carried out in the Incarnation,—Passion,—Resurrection; but which finds its goal only in the Eucharist! As though in the Eucharist alone, O my God! Thy immense love could be fully satisfied. For when from the heights of heaven Thou didst turn upon us Thy pitying gaze, even then, indeed, Thou wast

seeking us, but Thou hadst not found us;—when in the progress of ages Thou wast born in Bethlehem, wast seen perambulating Palestine, preaching and working miracles, Thou wast seeking us, Thou hadst not found us;—when on Calvary Thou didst breathe forth Thy spirit, even there, at the foot of the cross, Thine eye searched for us in vain; Thou wast seeking us, Thou hadst not found us.—But when, conducted by Thy grace, we kneel at Thy holy altar, then at last Thy search is over; then at last Thou hast found us; and reposing on our hearts canst say, “This my son was dead, but he is alive again by the communication of my own Divine life: I had lost him in the midst of the world; I have found him again in the Sacrament of my love”.

VII.

But who shall explain the happiness of the poor sinner, when received back to his

Divine Father's table! Ah! to be seated there again, after all that has passed; it is a bliss which he alone knows who has experienced it. If there be a communion calculated, in an especial manner, to inspire the tenderest gratitude, it is surely that which the repentant prodigal makes, when, after an absence of years from the most Holy Eucharist, he returns at length to his God in the sincerity of a generous conversion.

Nursed in the sanctuary of a Christian childhood, once at least—at the time, that is, of his first communion—he had received the bread of life into a pure heart. But boyhood came and went; youth followed with its temptations; the stormy gusts of passion blew; and by degrees he forgot, neglected, abandoned, each holy practice of earlier days. We saw him in the midst of the world; we saw him, and marvelled to see, how recklessly he gave himself up to be whirled round in its fatal vortex; how

eagerly he breathed its intoxicating fumes, for what is the world but smoke and vapour? how he was seduced again and again by its delusive hopes, for what is the world but vanity? how he caught at its countless phantoms as they crossed his path, for what is the world but the shadow of a shade?

Yet in that all but withered heart, from which both faith and love seemed to have fled for ever, there nevertheless still remained a remembrance and a remorse—the remembrance of that happy day when he made his first communion;—remorse for having offended so often, so deeply, a God whose sweetness he had then first learnt to know. And this smoking flax which God, in His mercy, has left still unquenched, suffices to rekindle the flame of piety in his heart. He recalls to mind his saintly mother; he recalls to mind those old devout domestics who had lulled his infancy to sleep with the sweet names of Jesus and Mary; he recalls to mind the first prayer he

ever said—"Our Father, who art in heaven!"—and recalling it, he says, "I will go to my father, and will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!" Ah, that Divine Father! already He has seen His son from afar; He has run to meet him, and now He strains him to His heart, and says to His servants, who are none else than His priests, "'Clothe him in the first robe'—in the robe of his Baptismal innocence: 'put on his finger a ring'—that memorial of our early love! for this day I purpose to place myself as a signet upon his arm and upon his heart,* upon his arm, to fortify him, upon his heart, to reanimate him: 'put shoes upon his feet',—that henceforth he may run in the way of my commandments with joy; and then prepare the Feast of reconciliation, that he may sit with me at my table, and father and son may rejoice together".

* Cant., viii. 6.

Ah, when that happy day arrives, what joy does the generous youth, thus rededicating himself to God, inspire in the hearts of all who best love him ! what entrancing delight does he experience in his own ! His mother, as she beholds him advancing to the sacred table, sheds the sweetest tears of her whole life, and exclaims, "My child was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found !" His Christian friends, so long rejected—so long, so sorrowfully estranged—as now they accompany him to the altar, repeat, in the gladness of their souls, "Our friend was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found". Heaven itself rejoices in his repentance : and the blessed angels, who had veiled their faces at the sight of his iniquities, regarding him now with ecstatic delight, chaunt in joyous choirs, "Our brother was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found !" But far more than his mother—far more than his friends—far more than the angels—does Jesus

Himself exult; and as He unites Himself with him in holy communion, “My child, my friend, my brother”, he exclaims, “who wast dead, and art alive again—who wast lost, and art found,—eat and drink, and be inebriated, O my beloved! and let us rejoice together; for I say to thee of a truth there is more joy in heaven over one sinner like thyself, who doth penance, than over ninety and nine just persons, who need not penance”.*

VIII.

For us, meanwhile, whose happy lot it has been to pass our days in sweet security within the sanctuary of our God, and beneath the shades of His tabernacle—for us, to whom our dear Saviour has ever been able to say, “All that I have is thine, *omnia mea tua sunt*”—let us beware of resembling the elder brother in the parable. Assured that the treasures of our Lord ex-

Luke, xv. 7.

ceed in their infinite sufficiency all that we can ask or imagine, let us entreat Him to pour them far and wide; let us supplicate Him to behold from afar—oh, how afar!—those dear friends of our youth now wandering astray in the world; to run after them, since they come not to meet Him; to overtake them in His divine compassion, and to press them to His all-merciful heart; conscious that, although they have resisted the threatenings of His justice, they will not be able to withstand the allurements of His love. But, above all, let us beseech Him to conduct them to His divine Table, that, found again, alive again, they may bless their Father who is in heaven, and rejoice with us, as we with them, through a happy eternity. Amen.

Ninth Meditation.

FIRST AND LAST COMMUNION.

Exitus matutini et vespere delectabis.

Thou shalt gladden my morn and eve.

Ps., lxiv. 9.

I.

As the tourist climbs some lofty mountain, he pauses occasionally in his ascent, and surveying in turn the expanse at his feet and the eminences yet to be won, finds a secret enjoyment in contrasting the impressions he has already received with those still awaiting him.

Fatigue he has already had, no doubt, in plenty; his feet have been sorely galled against the sharp rocks; his garments lacerated by opposing thorns and briars. But then, to compensate for this, how many pleasurable emotions has he experienced! how many delightful reminiscences has he stored up in his memory! In proportion

as he has increased his elevation, the atmosphere has become purer—the sky more brilliant—the landscape more broadly and variedly unrolled; while, from time to time, some object of more special interest—a romantic glen—a sparkling rivulet—a slip of livelier green—has imprinted itself in fancy's mirror, to be recalled again and again with fresh delight.

So, too, as regards the heights that yet remain to be surmounted. Many a struggle there must be, he knows well, many a difficulty—nay, perhaps, many a fall. But then again, by way of recompense, there is the glorious prospect from the summit—there is the repose on the thymy grass—the well-earned refreshment; and reanimated by the thought, he starts forward with increased vigour.

II.

Something, methinks, resembling this, is the case with ourselves, when, in the

ascent of life, we pause, so to say, by an act of reflection, and compare our past with that future which Providence may still reserve for us.

Our past!—We gaze down upon it, and at once a varied tissue of good and evil days unrolls itself before us. Let us consider them in turn.

And first, our evil days!—Ah! who has not known them? Who has not learnt, by sad experience, that as the bird is made to fly, so man is born to labour and sorrow? * Tears were our first indication of life; and our early infancy was but one long lamentation. Youth succeeded, with its toils and trials—its first deceptions of self-love—and its strange, causeless melancholies, as though, with the sense of her dawning faculties, the soul received also a perception of her native nothingness. Then, later on, there came the exhausting struggles, the disappointments, the reverses of maturer

* Job, v. 7.

life; and worse than all, those harrowing bereavements, which can never be erased from memory. Alas! how many smiled round our cradles, over whose graves we now weep in vain! How many sweet companions of our youth have we left behind on the road? How many who came after us in life, have preceded us in death! Oh, to think that so brief a length of years, of days, should suffice to comprehend such a vast amount of misery!

But when we look back with the eye of a Christian,—of a Catholic,—what are all the miseries of our life gone by, compared with its sins? Ah! it is here the bitterness of the past lies. Too well do we know our iniquities, and our sins are ever before us.* What gift have we received from the bountiful hand of our Maker, that we have not more or less defiled? What fruit have we produced worthy of our

* Ps., l. 5.

divine vocation? Virtues neglected, graces quenched, talents buried in the earth—alas! how sad a catalogue on the score of omission alone! And then the miserable days which, if we might, we would shroud for ever in impenetrable darkness, because of the bitter shame and remorse which their memory brings!

Nevertheless, side by side with these mournful recollections, there are others, thanks be to God, which make our retrospect less gloomy.

And first, there is the memory of the good days—those brief intervals of happiness, which providence mercifully dispenses to every man born into the world, in order that he may be able to say, “I have tasted a little honey before I die”.* If childhood has its tears, it has also its serene joys; nestling itself in security from outward evils within that family circle whose limits form its horizon, and finding its whole

* I. Kings, xiv. 43.

world in the father whom it venerates, and the mother whom it loves. If youth has its griefs, it has also its delights, as the riper intellect begins to energize in noble efforts, and as the warm heart opens to those sacred affections, which have the promise of abiding felicity.

But as of all recollections the bitterest to the Christian is that of his sins, so, too, nothing in the past has such a charm for him as the memory of those divine graces which he has received from his earliest years. He dwells with fond delight on the thought of his Baptism, that free gift of God, the source of all his happiness. He remembers with gratitude his first prayer, his first alms, the first day he knelt at church by his mother's side; or if he was too young at the time to retain these events in his memory, he feels still greater thankfulness in the recollection that with him religion and life began together. Then, again, what favours has he received from

Heaven, as day by day he grew up beneath its eye! how often has the word of truth been echoed in his heart; how many a gracious inspiration has he received! how many good works has he not already laid up in the garner of his Lord!

Among all the events, however, all the acts, all the graces of his past life, none stand so high on his list of mercies as the Communion he has made. They have been the perfume of his life—a perfume which lingers yet, and which he loves to breathe. They have been the treasure of his days, and he counts it over with a holy pride. How can he forget that each successive Communion has been to him a reinvigoration in weakness, a shield in peril, an antidote against corruption, and has contributed either to impart a new virtue, or, at least, to give him a love for it! How can he forget the delight with which he has ever drawn near to the altar of his God—that God who made glad his youth!*

And yet may it not be said, too, that our Communions, like the stars of Heaven, differ in glory? And while each of them has gathered together riches, is there not one that has surpassed all the rest?* Yes, as among the past felicities of our life we place in the first rank the supernatural graces which we have received, and among those graces our Communions; so, too, amongst all our Communions, there is one to which we return in thought again and again, and on which we love to dwell, as the sweetest remembrance of our existence—our first Communion!

III.

Our first Communion! Oh! how well were we disposed for it, either by the innocence of our early years, or by the sincerity of a first repentance! Our first Communion! Ah! then it was that Jesus entering our heart's open door, gave us His first kiss of peace. Then the Angels

* Prov., xxxi. 29.

beholding us receive Him, felt a holy envy, and marvelled how beings so sublimely blest could have been created lower than themselves.* Then in hymn and joyful canticle the Christian people sang over us their glad hosannas. Then, forgetful of their child-birth pangs and later anxieties, our mothers exulted in having brought into the world one who had become the tabernacle of his God! Then, oh, how sweet were our tears, how prevailing our petitions, how seraphic our song! Then, oh, how lively was our faith, how strong our hope, how deep, how true our love!

Compared with the day of our first Communion, every other, however brilliant, turns pale and dim. Whatever may have been our subsequent happiness, our subsequent graces, that first Communion outshines them all:—cast, like a pearl of price, into our life's profoundest depth, and glistening up through the ocean of years!

* Ps., viii. 6.

IV.

But let us now turn our gaze from the expanse at our feet, and survey the steeps that yet remain to be surmounted. We have reviewed the past; let us contemplate the future, with its corresponding promise and presage of joys and griefs, hopes and fears, good and evil days.

And first, it will undoubtedly have its miseries. For as we advance in years (supposing years to be granted us), God, in His tender Providence, will disconnect us more and more from the world which we have to quit; and because we are so inclined to prefer present earthly joys to eternal felicity, He will either take those joys away, or convert them into bitterness. We shall see infirmities, by little and little, wasting our frames and enfeebling our mental powers. We shall see, as in days gone by, many an illusion break up, to leave behind a far wider desolation than of

yore. We shall see many a tie of love and friendship again sundered, but far more hopelessly; and gradually, as life goes on, we shall find our choice to lie no longer between different shades of happiness, but rather between a long series of earthly miseries, and the perpetuity of celestial joys.

There is something, however, worse than misery; and as in our review of the past, the most poignant recollection is that of our sins, so when, as Christians, we look forward to the future, what we have most to dread is our own unfaithfulness.

Yes, Lord, if, as I advance in life, I abhor and detest the world more and more, it is not only because thorns of sorrow spring up in its every path, but much more because I behold in it a scene of untiring offences against Thy Divine Majesty; because in the world our hearts become a mass of corruption, our minds the sport of every wind that blows; because, in the world we

are unprovided against peril, and defenceless against seduction; because, in the world, the perishing vanities of a day are suffered to eclipse Thee Thyself, my God, O beauty ever ancient, ever new!

Thus, then, in the future, I may expect, if I live, trials and miseries, and worse than all, it may be my unhappiness, O terrible thought! again, and yet again, to offend my sweet Maker by my sins. Yet, if there is all this to fear, is there not also much to hope? May there not even still be some happiness in reserve for me? some good days to make amends for the evil?

Ah! one thing, at least, I have learnt from the past—the emptiness, the nothingness of mere human felicity! This, then, I desire not—I ask not of Thee, O my God! Sufficient happiness for me to have confided wholly into Thy hands my earthly future. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall want for nothing.* He will give

* Ps., xxii. 1.

me my daily bread, as day by day I seek it at His hands. He who clothes the lilies of the field, will clothe me also. He who shelters the sparrow and the turtle-dove, will find for me, too, a place where I may lay my head. And with this tender confidence in my heavenly Father's love, I can afford to dismiss every apprehension that worldly prudence may suggest.

But what I desire, what I eagerly crave, what my Christian heart anticipates from the bounty of its God, is this—increasing grace as life goes on, and greater fidelity in its use.

Ah! what holy inspirations may I not yet receive? What words of truth may not yet touch my heart? Soon, very soon, perhaps, I shall hear that voice of exhortation for which my soul has so long waited. Soon, very soon, perhaps, I shall hold in my hands that very book which is destined to enkindle within me the love of my God. But above all, I hope to be

more faithful to divine grace. I have prayed much in time past; I will pray more and will pray better. I have undertaken many a good work; I will undertake many more, and with more persevering effort. I have laboured in the acquirement of Christian virtues; I will labour on, and with greater success. Such are the devout anticipations which illuminate my future, and make the present joyous!

But after all, "what is there", in the Christian life, "good or beautiful, in comparison with the wheat of the elect, and the wine that maketh virgins?"* My chief, my surest hope, lies undoubtedly in the Communion which I may yet be permitted to make. In past years, I joyed to approach the altar of that God who made glad my youth: in the years to come, my delight shall be in the altar of Him who makes young my age! The more I withdraw, with increasing infirmities, from the business of life, the more shall the silent solitude of

* Zach., ix. 17.

the sanctuary become my passion and my joy; and in proportion as I sever the ties that bind me to the world, I will multiply those which unite me to God.

Nevertheless, as but now among my past Communion, I preferred one in particular to the rest, as my sweetest remembrance; so, too, among my future Communion, is there not a special one which I may distinguish as my fondest hope? I picture to myself the varied events of my life to come; I accompany them in thought with fervent Communion; but which of all these events, of all these Communion, stands out in relief as more momentous than the rest? Ah! when I consider that my life must have a term,—that this term is nothing less than a passing from time into eternity,—that at the moment thus decisive of my fate, if my crown will be nearer, my dangers also will be greater and more imminent,—and that in that same moment, Thou, O dearest Lord! wilt come to unite Thyself with me

in the most holy Eucharist, dispersing all my fears, and offering me Thyself as my reward;—when I consider all this, no longer can I be at a loss. At once I acknowledge that, as my sweetest remembrance is my first Communion, so my fondest hope is my last !

V.

My last Communion ! Ah ! I shall not have then to go and seek Jesus in His Sanctuary as heretofore. He will Himself come to visit me on my bed of anguish. However lowly the roof that covers me, He will not disdain to enter ; and, oh, how rich in blessings will His entrance prove ! On the day of my first Communion, He fed me like a tender mother from His own breast ; and now He divides to me the bread of the strong, that I may ascend without fainting His holy hill. Then He greeted me with His first kiss of peace ; and now He will give me His last, ere I sink into the sleep of death on His sacred bosom.

My last Communion! Ah! then will those sacramental veils, which I have so long sought to pierce, be about, O wondrous thought! to drop for ever. A few moments more, and I shall behold God face to face; a few moments more, and I shall hold fast the beloved of my soul.* As yet, indeed, He is behind the wall, but already He has opened the lattice, so to say, and is looking through. Already there thrill upon me the faint vibrations of that voice which I am to hear in Heaven. Oh! what will this life's joys or woes matter to me then! Its woes will no longer be able to touch me; its joys I shall disdain, for in the light of my last Communion I shall behold them as they are. Even death itself will have no terror for me. Love is stronger than death, and in the impatience of my love, I shall yearn, like St. Paul, to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.†

My last Communion! Yes, it is the

* Cant., iii. 4.

† Phil., i. 23

object towards which all my hopes and aspirations centre; for if my first Communion lies as a precious pearl at the bottom of life's ocean, this, on the other hand, shines out like a star on the horizon of years, inviting and guiding me heavenward; and thus, grateful for my Lord's enduring mercies, I may well say—" *Exitus matutini et vespere delectabis*,—Thou shalt gladden my morn and eve;—my morn, because Thou art the sweetest reminiscence of my youth; my eve, because Thou art the expectation and hope of my age".

VI.

These two Communion, then—our first and our last—are, as it were, the two terms, the starting point and the goal, of that path along which the Divine mercy is leading us to our heavenly home. And, oh, how thankful ought we to be for this unmerited goodness of our God, when we consider what multitudes of our fellow-men, aliens

to the faith of Jesus, preserve of their past only the bitter memory of a time gone by, and see nought in their future but the spectral horrors that environ the threshold of the tomb!

But there is another consideration still more important, suggested by our present subject, and with it I conclude.

Why is my first Communion so sweet to dwell upon? Why do I expect so much from my last? Is it not, because at my first Communion my hands were pure, my heart full of love, my soul radiant in the beauty of innocence? Is it not, because at my last, I look forward to being completely detached from the world, and intent upon nothing else but the attainment of celestial bliss?

But if it be so—if on the one hand innocence and love, on the other, detachment from the world and an ardent desire for Heaven, suffice to render these two Communions so perfect—why should I not

endeavour to make all my Communion resemble my first and last? Why should I not strive, when I approach the holy table, to blend the innocence of childhood with the aspirations of the departing soul? Why should not each of my Communion be at once, with my first, a tender bond of love uniting me to Jesus; with my last, an eternal adieu to the world? Why should not my thanksgivings after every Communion I make, be as ardent as they were when Jesus first entered my heart,—as they will be when He admits me to the skies?

Oh! did we thus live, what felicity would be ours! Each successive Communion reflecting, as in a mirror, our first and last, would become at once our sweetest remembrance and our fondest hope. The great aim of our existence would be to become better and better Christians, so as to be able to communicate daily. And how sweet a charm would this blessed privilege diffuse in turn over our whole

life, as every night, on laying down to rest, we gratefully repeated—"To-day, O sweetest remembrance! I received the Body of my Lord. And to-morrow to-morrow, O sweetest hope! I expect to receive it again!"

Tenth Meditation.

THE PASSION AND THE EUCHARIST.

*Constituit eum super excelsam terram, ut
sugeret mel de petra oleumque de saxo
durissimo.*

He hath set him on a high land, that he
may suck honey out of the rock, and oil
from the flinty stone.—DEUT., xxxii. 13.

I.

DELIVERED by a mighty arm from Egyptian bondage, the people of Israel were at length on the point of entering the promised land, when their great law-giver, closing his arduous mission with a sublime canticle of praise, thus depicted their blessedness:—
“He hath set him on a high land, that he may suck honey out of the rock, and oil from the flinty stone”.

The whole history of the Israelites, it need hardly be observed, is one continuous type and prophecy of God's dealings, as with His Church in general, so also with the individual Christian soul. “All these

things happened to them", says St. Paul, "in figure, and are written for our correction, upon whom the ends of the world are come".* We are justified, therefore, in looking for a meaning in these words of Moses, transcending their immediate application—a meaning shadowed forth, indeed, in the Old dispensation, but realised only in the New.

Oh, my soul! encouraged by this consideration, let us ponder the inspired sentence before us, and search out the hidden treasure it contains, assured of finding that which suits our need.

And first I ask myself, what may I understand by that "high land" whither the Lord conducts me?

That high land—that elevated region—so exalted above the valley of this world—so near heaven, yet not heaven—what else can it adumbrate to me but the altar of my God?

* I. Cor., x. 11.

The divine altar!—there it is, then, that I am to gather honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty stone!

But here again is a mystery. What harder than the rock?—than the flinty stone? What softer than oil and honey? How then shall honey flow from the rock? how shall the flinty stone teem with oil? And first, this rock, this stone, themselves—what are they?

Ah! when I consider that on the rock of Calvary was immolated that divine Victim who died for the world's salvation—when I consider that on the consecrated stone of the Christian altar that same divine Victim is perpetually sacrificed anew to the world's end—instinctively I feel that by the rock and flinty stone can be symbolized nothing less than the most sacred Passion of Jesus.

Finally, I ask myself what is the honey that I am to gather from this rock—what the oil from this stone?

Let us reflect again, O my soul! and,

assisted by what has gone before, we shall not find the answer difficult. The Christian altar, while, on the one hand, it represents to us the death of our dear Lord—His body crucified, His blood poured forth—on the other hand, presents the same divine Victim to us as our delectable feast. If the Eucharist is a sacrifice, it is also a sacrament. To this holy sacrament I draw near. I taste this precious food, and it is sweeter than honey to my lips; I sip this inebriating draught, and it gives more strength to my soul than ever oil gave to the wrestler's limbs!

When, therefore, I ask myself what is the honey, what the oil, that I am to gather from the rock, from the stone of the Passion,—my heart quickly responds, that this honey, this oil, are the divine Eucharist—that Eucharist which Jesus has left me as the memorial of His Passion—that Eucharist which reposes on the same altar upon which He is daily immolated anew—

that Eucharist, whose solemn rite, encircled by His beloved Apostles, He so touchingly instituted at the supper preceding His death !

Yes: the rock and stone are the Passion of Jesus; but from this rock, this stone, I gather the honey and oil of the Eucharist; and, oh! how sweet, how consoling, to think that it should be so!—to think of the union which thus closely, thus mutually links together these two divine mysteries—the Passion and the Eucharist!

Viewed in itself, the Passion of Jesus, ineffable, inconceivable a mercy though it be, is, nevertheless, full of bitterness to the Christian heart. It is bitter to us, because of the frightful agonies which it recalls, of one who so loved us. It is bitter to us, because of our sins, which caused those agonies. It is bitter to us, again, because of the severe self-mortification which it inculcates. But that bitterness is tempered to us by the honeyed sweetness of the Eucharist; that severity its healing oil assuages and softens.

Bitter, however, as the Passion is to us, Jesus has been beforehand with us in tasting its bitterness, and to Him it was bitter in a degree infinitely more intense. It was bitter to Him, because of the acute bodily and mental suffering which it involved. It was bitter to Him, because it tore Him from a world which He had condescended to love. It was bitter to Him, because He so clearly foresaw the ingratitude with which it would be requited by mankind. Nevertheless, to Jesus also its bitterness was assuaged, was sweetened; and what sweetened, what assuaged it to Him, was the thought of that divine Sacrament which He had just before instituted. Ere I proceed, then, to consider the consolations which, in connexion with the Passion, the Eucharist offers to my own heart, let me meditate upon those which it brought to His. Let me picture to myself the Man of Sorrows, faintly and weariedly bearing His burden up the hill of Calvary, yet comforting Himself with the consciousness that first and foremost

of mankind He ascends that high land, as the head and chief of our race, there to gather for all generations honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone!

The Eucharist tempers the bitterness of the Passion, first, to Jesus, secondly, to ourselves:—such is our subject. Ah! let us enter upon it with that love, with that tenderness, which it deserves. And who knows but that, blending thus in our hearts' depth these two transporting mysteries, we may learn to love them each better for the other's sake—the Eucharist, because in the Passion we see its infinite value—the Passion, because to it we owe the Eucharist itself.

II.

The Eucharist tempers to Jesus the bitterness of His Passion.

The Passion was bitter to Jesus, as we have seen: first, on account of the intolerable agonies, mental and bodily, which it

involved. . . . But Jesus, before He suffered, instituted the most Holy Eucharist; and the thought of the immense happiness which this divine Sacrament was to confer on the world, was sweeter to Him than His sufferings were painful.

The more we study the life of Jesus, the more we shall see that love for us, and the desire to make us happy, constitute, from beginning to end, if one may so speak, its leading idea. Love for us! here is the starting-point of His earthly race; our happiness! here is its goal. But between these two terms what a long and painful interval! what an abyss to be crossed! what torments, what a death to be endured! No matter. He cares not for torments, He cares not for death, provided only He can further our felicity, which is His all in all. His own wounds are nought to Him, if He can but staunch ours! That He may dry our tears, He is content Himself to weep! That He may console our sorrows, He

denies Himself every joy; and for all His labours, for all His pains, the only reward He claims of His heavenly Father is our greater happiness. Ever side by side with His own griefs comes our felicity, as their antidote and compensation.

The wretchedness, the chill poverty of His wintry cradle scare Him not away; because He foresees how round that poor crib, in after ages, generations shall kneel in adoring love—hearts shall open to divine influences—troubles shall cease to vex—enmities shall find an end—mothers shall exult, and infants sing for joy!

So, too, again at His life's close, this same love so dearly cherished, becomes a source of yet greater misery to Him, of yet greater happiness to us;—of His greater misery, the Passion! of our greater happiness, the Eucharist!

Yes! such is His most compassionate will. From His own inconceivable agonies our Feast of delights is to proceed. On

their very verge He institutes the most Holy Sacrament; and in their very midst the thought of that happiness, which He has thus laid in store for us, at once comforts His soul, and re-invigorates Him to suffer.

Ah! how I love to follow Jesus as He leaves that chamber of His Last Supper, and winds along by Cedron and Olivet, to Calvary's fatal hill! With what entrancing delight I listen to that divine Canticle of praise, which, like another Moses, He sings with His Apostles, ere His earthly mission ends!

At last He is raised on the cross. I behold Him dying in untold agonies;—but even there the recollection of the Eucharist comes as a cool breath to console His fiery torments. He more readily endures to be ground as wheat and crushed in the wine-press of divine wrath, when He thinks of that life-giving Bread and Wine, which He has prepared for future ages,—when He

thinks of the devout multitudes who will flock round His Cross in after times, to gather honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty stone. *Mel de petra oleumque de saxo durissimo !*

But, secondly, the Passion is bitter to Jesus, as tearing Him from a world which He has condescended to love—a world most dear to His heart, because He loves it, not as those love it who live but for its excitements, ambitions, and vanities, but as one sent by His Eternal Father to be its divine Benefactor—a world most dear to Him, because He comes to redeem it with His blood ; because He has sounded forth the word of life over its desert wastes ; because He has wrought in it so many glorious miracles ; because, in a word, He understands but too well its ineffable need of His divine presence. . . . Ah ! surely if it is our affection for those we leave behind that renders death painful, Jesus, beyond all others, had cause to exclaim : “ O death !

is it thus that thou partest us from those we love?"*

Now, to sweeten this bitter parting,—to assuage its pain,—what consolation shall Jesus find? He finds it in the Eucharist. Already, before death removes Him from the world, He has, in the institution of this blessed sacrament, devised the means of renewing and multiplying His life! He dies for us; yet, O superabundance of compassion! He leaves us not orphans. The Eucharist restores Him to His children! Day by day, from one end of the world to the other, no sooner has the priest uttered those words of might, which he has received from Jesus, than instantaneously Jesus Himself,—body, soul, and divinity,—is in the midst of us. Neither is aught wanting to the perfection of this His Eucharistic presence. He is present in the fulness of His essence. He is present in the fulness of His power, in the fulness of His love.

* I. Kings, xv. 32.

O ye blind ones! come to the altar of Jesus: He is passing along thereby as once on the road to Jericho, and will open your eyes to the light.* O ye feeble ones! without heart or strength for virtue, come to the altar: Jesus is the same Jesus there as at Capharnaum of yore, and will say to you, as He did to the paralytic†—“Thy sins are forgiven thee; arise and walk”. O ye penitent Magdalens! come to the altar: He who abode in the house of Simon the leper, abides also there; and if you love Him with Mary Magdalen, He will pardon you, even as He pardoned her.‡ O all ye who are tossed, disquieted, worn out, by the storms of life, come to the altar: Jesus is present there as of old on the lake Gennezareth. He will speak the word, and at once you shall experience a great calm.

Ah! when we think of our dear Lord's

* Mark, x. 46.

† Luke, v. 23.

‡ Luke, vii. 48.

exceeding love for us, can we wonder that the thought of all the gracious marvels which the Eucharist was to work amongst us to the end of time, should console Him at His last hour? Enabled thus to preserve to us the advantage of His divine presence, He more easily embraces the cross; and that all-tender love is satisfied, which would not suffer Him to live amongst us without dying for us, nor even to die for us, if by dying He must for ever leave us!

Lastly, the passion is bitter to Jesus, because He so clearly foresees the ingratitude with which it will be requited by mankind. Already that ingratitude has caused Him many a pang. Those whom He has loved the dearest, betray and deny Him; those whom He has loaded with favours, overwhelm Him with outrage and mockery; those whom He has come to save nail Him to a cruel cross. What could He have done for His vineyard that He has not done? He looked that it should bring forth grapes,

and it hath brought forth wild grapes.*
And when from the dismal scene before
Him He glances to future times, in search,
haply, of some relief, alas for the cruel
spectacle that presents itself! How little
has His crown of thorns availed towards
reducing the pride of the world! how little
has His scourging diminished its sensuality,
His crucifixion its sins! O most sad and
dreary reflection to our fond Redeemer!
. Yet even here, from the very
midst of this anguish, there rises up a
thought full of comfort—the thought of
the Eucharist! This very sacrament it-
self, doubtless, will be the occasion of much
ingratitude; but then how many hearts
will it warm into life! how many devoted
deeds will it inspire! What a furnace of
love will it kindle in the bosom of the
whole Church, inextinguishable alike by
the indifference of some and the perverse-
ness of others.

* Is., v. 4.

If many a future Judas shall betray his Master, how many a beloved disciple, on the other hand, shall recline his head in bliss on that same divine Master's breast!

Yes! at that last all-memorable Supper, Jesus formed for Himself a holy and elect nation—a people all His own—a people whose sole country is the Eucharistic Altar—whose sole food is the divine bread from that Altar—whose affections, whose thoughts, whose life, are centred in the God of that Altar! Oh! how sweet to sever one's self, though but for a moment, from the world and all that is in the world, and united in spirit with that chosen people of every land and every age, to meditate before the most Holy Eucharist on all the acts of love, adoration, devotedness, to which it has given birth, from the last Supper until now!

Oh, what solemn scenes! what countless glistening sanctuaries! what clouds of incense floating up to Heaven! what things

of worshippers bent in adoring love! what harmonies worthy of angelic choirs! what ardent petitions! what uplifted hands! what precious tears, surpassing all earthly joys! what blissful days, each better than a thousand elsewhere!* what holy midnight vigils flooding the soul with a delicious radiance, *nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis*! what celestial aspirations! what transporting ecstasies! what glowing words! what sublime deeds, conceived, designed, accomplished!—in one word, what love! what overflowing love, outpoured and shed abroad by the most Holy Eucharist through the wide world!

It is indeed a perpetual fountain of love all the earth over; and most truly may be said, that, beyond aught else in the world, it has contributed to make Jesus loved. Hereafter when the veil is withdrawn which now conceals Him from us, we shall know Him better, we shall adore

* Ps., lxxxiii. 11.

Him more fervently ; yet I question whether in Heaven itself we shall love Him more intensely than He has been loved from the first, is loved now, and will be loved to the world's end, in the most Holy Eucharist !

Thus admirably does this divine Sacrament compensate to Jesus for the ingratitude of mankind ; and in the ardent affections for Him, in the zeal for holy works, which it inspires, I seem to recognize again that honey and oil which He gathers from the rock and flinty stone of His passion. *Mel de petra, oleumque de saxo durissimo.*

III.

But it is not to Jesus alone that the Eucharist tempers the bitterness of His Passion : it tempers that bitterness also to ourselves.

And first, the Passion is bitter to us, as we have seen, because of the cruel sufferings which it recalls, of one who so deeply

loved us. But then, on the other hand, when we contemplate our dear Saviour in that glorified beatific state in which the Eucharist presents Him to us,—dividing Himself, as it were, between the joys of Heaven and the sweet repose of the Tabernacle, this thought mitigates the horrors of Calvary, and soothes the anguish of our souls.

Secondly, the Passion of Jesus is bitter to us, because of our sins, which occasioned that terrible expiation. Ah! how can we look back otherwise than with remorse on those painful scenes in which Jesus is the victim, and ourselves the executioners! But then in turn what a joy to think that the blessed Eucharist, whether as a sacrifice or as a sacrament, reopens to us the bosom of our God!

The Eucharist brings before us the Passion, not as a savage scene of horror, the dreadful consequence of our misdeeds, but rather as a pledge of love—as a token of

reconciliation—as a covenant of peace. In this great, unbloody sacrifice, Jesus is no longer the ensanguined victim, dying on Calvary amidst the taunts of His enemies, but rather the Pacific Host, which, borne aloft by the angel of God to the sublime Altar on high, sheds down upon us benediction and grace from the throne of the divine Majesty.

Thus, while the remembrance of our guilt, so inseparably blended with the thought of our dear Lord's sufferings, necessarily afflicts and saddens us, the reflection, on the other hand, that, if Jesus dies on the cross for our sins day by day in the most Holy Eucharist, He rises again, so to say, for our justification, relieves our self-condemning hearts, and deprives guilt of half its misery.

Lastly, the Passion of our Lord is bitter to us, because of the severe self-mortification which it inculcates. What an example is that of a God crucified! How ardu-

ous the virtues which it imposes, the perfection to which it calls! The sacrifice of all! the renunciation of all! resignation in trouble! patience in suffering! forgiveness of injuries! O hard and difficult saying, who can hear it?* Here, then, the Eucharist again comes in, and, like oil out-poured, *oleum effusum*, tempers the rigour of the cross. Not, indeed, that it teaches differently from the Passion, or sets any other example before us. Both inculcate the same truths, with this sole distinction, that what the Passion urges upon us with an austere severity, the Eucharist softly and sweetly insinuates.

The Passion seems to say, "If thou wilt be Christ's disciple, take up thy cross and follow Him". The Eucharist adds, "But if you feel that cross heavy, if you faint beneath its burden, come to me and I will refresh you". The Passion solemnly announces, "If thou wilt enter the kingdom,

* John, vi. 61.

die to the world and to thyself, and sacrifice to Jesus the dearest affections of thy heart". The Eucharist rejoins, " But if thou die to the world, I will give thee for thy possession Him who infinitely excels the world. If thou sacrifice thy earthly affections, thou shalt receive in recompense that divine Saviour who loves thee better than father, or mother, or sister, or brother".

O immense goodness of our God, thus sweetly disposing all things for our happiness, and tempering one mercy by another in pity to our infirmities! Rugged, then, and arduous to nature as is the rock of Calvary, let us climb it courageously, cheered by the prospect of gathering from the altar-stone on its summit, that sweet reward of our toils deposited there by our divine Saviour, the oil, the honey of the Eucharist! *Mel de petra oleumque de saxo durissimo.*

IV.

First, the rock and the flinty stone! then the oil and the honey!

O most dear Lord, and may I not say that this is ever the token, the effect of Thy presence? Who but Thyself can bring honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone? Through whom but Thee can we draw good out of evil, bliss out of suffering? And to whom, then, can we better resign ourselves than to Thee? in whom more entirely confide?

Oh! through the pilgrimage that may yet lie before me—at every rock of offence, at every stone of stumbling that shall threaten my steps, permit me to find oil and honey—give me Thy Eucharist! When Satan wages war against me, and my limbs faint in the fierce struggle, shed over them Thy reviving oil—give me Thy Eucharist! When difficulties perplex, when troubles overwhelm, be Thy divine honey near to enlighten my eyes and refresh my heart—give me Thy Eucharist! And so, helping me onward, be Thou, Lord, my support and stay, till Thou bring me

at last to that lofty region, on whose verdant paradisaic lawns neither rock nor stone appears, where danger is not—where toil is not—where infirmity is not; but as an oil of perfume, celestial beatitude steeps the soul, and the ambrosial honey of divine delights is her all-blissful food and inebriation for ever!

Eleventh Meditation.

WHERE THE SOUL FINDS HER GOD.

Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.

As the hart panteth after the fountains of water,
so my soul panteth after thee, O God!

Ps., xli. 1.

I.

HE whose royal harp celebrates beforehand, in such manifold strains, the mysteries of Christianity, was not likely to omit a sacrament so holy and august as the Blessed Eucharist. Accordingly, throughout the Psalms, it is constantly appearing and re-appearing under a variety of types:—“How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!”—“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall want nothing; He hath set me in a place of pasture”.—“My chalice, which inebriateth me, how goodly is it!” Such is the figurative language in which the

Prophet King at once announces the great Sacrament of love, and records its praise.

But of all the Psalms, none, to my mind, so lively portrays the Blessed Eucharist, and, at the same time, the feelings of the Christian heart with regard to it, as the forty-first, in its opening verses:—

“As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God!

“My soul is athirst for the strong and living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?

“My tears have been my bread day and night, while it is said to me daily, where is thy God?

“These things I remembered, and poured out my soul within me; for I shall go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God.

“With the voice of joy and praise; the noise of one feasting.

“Why art thou sad, O my soul! and wherefore dost thou trouble me?”

Let us muse upon these inspired words, so full of profound meaning; let us endeavour to enter into their mysterious depths.

II.

“As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God!” How beautifully does the Prophet express in this image that ardent yearning which draws the soul towards its God! But wherefore, it may be asked, should he—should the Holy Scriptures in general—have recourse to figure at all?

It is because, wrapt, during our present probation, in the swaddling bands, so to say, of a terrestrial life, and placed under the influence of an external universe, we need, in order to the attainment of superior truths, the assistance of visible objects.* All that strikes our senses, all that belongs to the world of matter, is easy enough to our comprehension; our difficulty lies in framing conceptions of unseen realities—of

* Rom., i. 20.

God—of Heaven—of Hell—of Eternity
—of divine grace—of our own spiritual
condition.

Oh, sad and humiliating effect of original sin! That the hart should pant for his well-known spring—that the parched and arid plain should thirst for the dew of Heaven—this we can readily understand; but the divine truths symbolized under such expressions—the yearning of the wearied soul for Him who is its living water—the thirst of our arid nature for the long-lost dew of divine grace—alas! how slowly, how imperfectly, do we take them in! That the poor captive, buried in a rayless dungeon, should sigh for a gleam of light—this we can comprehend; but that we ourselves are in that poor captive's wretched state, that we need light, and have it not in ourselves—this, who shall persuade us?

But if the scriptural use of figurative language in general tacitly admonishes us

of our inferiority, as creatures bound up with a material world, this particular passage of the Psalmist reveals to us, at the same time, our true greatness. "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God!" The thirst of the dumb animal is for mere material water; he obtains it, and is satisfied. The thirst of the immortal soul is for God Himself; and the divine immensity alone can satiate it! O man, behold here the measure of thy dignity! Compare a draught of water with the Infinite, and thou hast meted out the distance that separates the brute from thyself!

Yet remember, nevertheless, the condition upon which this thy greatness is made to depend. Remember, that if thou deviate from thy sublime destiny—if thou glue thyself to material delights—from that moment thou ceaseest to resemble thyself, and art turned into the likeness of the brute creation. The panting stag may slake his

thirst at an earthly spring; but the natural aspiration of the human soul is for Thee, and for Thee alone, O God!

III.

This desire, however, which thus carries us on towards God—is it founded on some real necessity of our being, or is it but a fiction of our own minds, noble, indeed, but a fiction still? Is it based in the very essence of our moral and intellectual nature, or shall we rather call it an invention of man, of society, of civilization? Oh, far from us be the impious thought! No; it is not thus that man invents. Created in the image of God, his inventions are rather how to degrade himself below the brute beasts. Created for eternal beatitude, his inventions are rather how to multiply his love for the passing and the perishable. Here his inventive powers stay—they can go no further. When, therefore, he discovers in the depths of his own conscious-

ness the perception of God—the desire of God—an affection towards God, he may not—he cannot—put aside these divine instincts, as though they were the mere offspring of his own will. They are his, independently of himself; and He who has confided them to him as a privilege, has imposed them also as an obligation.

Yes; just as God, in creating the body, has subjected it to appetites which, coarse and gross in their nature, find their scope in mere material enjoyment; so, in creating the soul, he has subjected it to an immense, an insatiable desire—that of possessing the supreme and absolute good—Himself. Sublime instinct of the heart! irresistible as that of sense, with this sole difference, that while the senses are perpetually drawing man downwards, this ethereal impulse, on the other hand, incessantly urging him towards a loftier goal, tends to elevate him above the mere material scene in which he moves. My earthly part thirsts for the

rill that flows at my feet; my heavenly yearns after Thee, my God, who reignest on high. My senses pant for terrestrial waters, in which is neither strength nor life; my soul aspires after Thee, my God, the living and the strong, who alone givest life and strength!

IV.

But David is not content with simply expressing the natural desire of the soul; he intimates also how that desired is to be fulfilled: "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"

When shall I come? "When", he cries, "shall I arrive at my journey's close? When shall I reach the end of my toils? For my soul, ever sighing after God, perpetually gravitates towards Him, as to its centre; and my life is but a long pilgrimage, with God for its goal—a troubled sea, with God for its haven—a banishment, with God for its term".

When shall I come? but wherefore?—
“To appear before His face!” Oh, sublime words, full of instruction and consolation!

Natural reason, it is true, has taught me to recognize the innate desire of my heart after God. But this desire is, after all, but vague and indefinite. Here, then, Faith comes in, and, making manifest what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive,* lays open to me the secrets of Heaven.

The divine essence and attributes—the most sacred Trinity, the adorable Unity—not only does Faith reveal to me these and their kindred doctrines concerning Him who is the instinctive object of my soul’s desire, but it also shows me in what the satisfaction of that desire consists. To appear before the face of God! to see Him as He is!† in His light to behold light!‡ here is supreme beautitude; here our natural desire finds its supernatural fulfilment. For

* I. Cor., ii. 9. † I. John, iii. 2. ‡ Ps., xxxv. 10.

as when the stag has slaked its thirst, it no longer pants after the fountain; so, my understanding once satiated with the sight of God, my heart with the love of God, I shall have nought else to seek for, and shall be ready, with the Psalmist, to exclaim—"What have I in Heaven besides Thee, and what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and my portion for ever!"*

To desire God—to draw near to God—to see God as He is,—such, then, David seems to teach us, are the stages by which the soul ascends heavenward.

To desire God,—this belongs to the very image of God in which we are created; to draw near to God, this is our great work; to see God as He is,—this is our sole felicity. The first is the noblest privilege of our nature, though, without grace, inefficacious; the second is the long labour of a Christian life; the third is our condition

in glory. With the first, supernaturalized by faith, all our good begins; in the second, is carried on; and in the third, finds its consummation.

Oh, how sublime, how consoling are these thoughts; how sweet thus to draw water from the Saviour's fountains!*

V.

Whence then comes it that, after such glowing aspirations, after so sublime an ascent of his soul into the heights of pure contemplation, the language of the Prophet suddenly veers round, as it were, and we hear him piteously exclaim, "My tears have been my bread day and night"? What connexion, one might ask, can there be between this effusion of love, on the one hand, and these tears, his bitter food by day and by night, on the other?

"I weep", he replies, "because concerning this Being so loved—so desired—so

* Is., xii. 3.

yearned for, I hear it daily said, 'Where is thy God?'

"Where is thy God?" Oh, question full of impiety, which even down to this time the blasphemous world ceases not to repeat, and which, oft as it is repeated, draws forth anew the Christian's tears!

For himself, he sees God in all things. God is to his soul her divine element, so to say—the very atmosphere she breathes. Does she live and move? God is her motion and her life. Does she advance heavenward? God is her way. Does she conceive and comprehend aught that is? God is her truth and intellectual basis. Does she express these conceptions? God is her word, her utterance. Does she love? God is her love. To be brief, God is her all in all; and, this being the case, how can she but feel the acutest pain, when, in contempt, as it were, of all her love, of all her homage, of all her longing desire, that infidel cry is ever rung in her ears by a

wicked world; "Where is thy God?—*ubi est Deus tuus?*"

Where art Thou, my God, where art Thou? Nay, rather, where art Thou not? "If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I descend into hell, Thou art there. If I take my wings early in the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me".*

Ah, then, whence comes it that the world cannot see Thee—cannot discover Thee? Absorbed in a vain idolatry, it knows, indeed, but too well where to find its own gods, those incentives of pride, of avarice, of guilty passion, before which it kneels; but Thee, the only true God, it knows not—it beholds not—and is constrained to ask, where art Thou?

I speak to the worldling of Thy works, the evidence of Thyself. He sees them—he apprehends them; but he disowns

* Ps., cxxxviii. 8.

their divine Maker. I speak to him of Thy gifts. He accepts them—he appropriates them, but he ignores the Giver. I address myself to his intellect; but he has become like the brute, without understanding.* I interrogate his heart, but oh, worst of all, it is in the depth of that very heart the fool hath said, “there is no God”.†

Alas! against such guilt, such madness, all language is powerless—all effort vain; and the only refuge left me is my tears. I sigh, I mourn over the injury done to my God. By day I weep over the dark deeds of the night. By night I weep over the blasphemies of the day. The bliss which I experienced in the thought of Him is turned into misery. Food refreshes me not. Sleep comforts me not. Tears have become my meat day and night.

Nay, O my God! shall I confess it? the incessant repetition of this suspicious doubt doet not simply grieve me. It perplexes,

* Ps., xlviii. 13.

† Ps., xiii. 1.

disturbs, disquiets my soul, and creates in it a strange confusion. "*Hæc recordatus sum, et effudi in me animam meam.* These things I remembered, and poured out my soul within me". With Isaias, mine eyes are wearied with looking up to heaven;* and, what with hearing perpetually echoed around me, "Where is thy God?" I begin, for every depression, to ask myself the same question, and to say, "My God, where art Thou? Where shall I find Thee?"

VI.

I ask, O my God! where Thou art to be found, and at once holy David suggests to me the reply; "I will go", he says, "into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God. There, amid songs of joy and praise, the noise of one feasting, I shall find Him whom I desire. Why shouldst thou be sad then, O my soul? and wherefore shouldst thou trouble me?"

* Is., xxviii. 14.

Ah, Lord, how clearly do I see the meaning of these beautiful words, and how I thank Thee for them! That wonderful tabernacle, that house where Thou dwellest, that feast of joy and praise—what can it be, but the divine Eucharist? And while I have that to comfort me, what can give me pain? While its sacred song gladdens my ear, who shall vex my heart? While I kneel before Thyself, there divinely present, who shall dare to ask me, “Where is thy God?”

The Eucharist; such, in one word, then, is the answer which the Christian gives to the worldling’s sceptical question. He points to the tabernacle, and triumphantly responds, “My God is there!”

VII.

“My God is there! My God is in yonder tabernacle!” Thus, then, I reply. And oh, how grateful ought I to be for that divine compassion which affords me the means of thus replying!

That God whom we adore—the immense infinite Spirit—dwells, it is most true, in all places, omnipresent in essence as in power ; but to be present with us invisibly, to be present with us in a mode appreciable only to our spiritual nature—this was not enough to satisfy the merciful designs of Him, who knows but too well the grossness and sensuality of our hearts.

There is no principle more essential to Christianity, more necessary to its due comprehension, than this—that, inasmuch as man is a compound being, consisting of two distinct substances, soul and body, God has willed that religion, the rule of our relationship with Him, should address itself equally to both of these—to our spiritual perceptions, on the one hand, to our corporeal perceptions, the senses, on the other.

Hence, between that gross materialism which makes the senses all in all, and that false spiritualism which sets them wholly

aside, the Christian religion, which is the expression of this Divine will and idea, has ever taken and maintained a middle line.

Witness its fundamental dogma, the Incarnation. The Infinite, uniting to Himself the finite!—the invisible, uniting to Himself the visible!—the Spiritual, uniting to Himself the material!—two natures, the Divine and human, linked in one eternal Person!—God made flesh! Such is the sublime mystery, the profound fact on which Christianity is based; and its whole system, its entire economy, as connected with, and deduced from, this great central truth, exhibits a corresponding twofold development. Everywhere, throughout this divine religion, the supernatural has its material counterpart; everywhere, we find their respective portions assigned to our spiritual and to our corporeal nature.

To our spiritual nature—to the soul—appertains that invisible spiritual grace, the supernatural gift of God, which, by its

habitual presence within us, constitutes our union with Him; to our corporeal nature—to the senses—appertain the sacraments, the material efficacious signs of that grace.

To our spiritual nature appertain prayer and all those interior movements which elevate the soul to God; to our corporeal nature, the whole circle of exterior worship.

So, too, with the evidences of religion. To our spiritual nature, to the intellect and conscience, correspond the metaphysical and moral proofs of Christianity; to our corporeal nature, to the perceptions of sense, corresponds its external testimony, as for instance, that of miracles.

The point which at present engages our attention is but another instance of the same principle. Viewed in His pure omnipresence, the Divine Being is the object, as we have seen, of our spiritual cognizance, and of that alone. The spiritual faculty contemplates God in the habitation of His own

immensity : it contemplates and adores. But in what habitation, in what counterpart visible abode shall He present Himself to our corporeal nature—to our senses? The Holy Eucharist supplies us with an answer. It exhibits to us a fixed spot, a definite locality where our God is present. We kneel before the Tabernacle; we gaze upon it, and we say to ourselves in strictest truth, “My God is there”. And oh, what joy, what ineffable bliss does this conviction bring with it! Once taught to find our God in the sacrament of His love, we care no more for what earth can do. In His beatific presence the soul can no longer be sad. All our disquietudes cease. And sweet as it is to think of Him in His supreme immensity, we find it sweeter still to contemplate Him, thus near to us, in His human, as in His divine nature; the object at once of our holiest adoration and of our tenderest sympathies.

VIII.

Thus it is, then, that, panting after her God, the soul finds Him at last in the all-blessed Eucharist ! There she draws near to Him ; there she invokes Him ; thither she directs her eyes as to Heaven itself ; there all her hopes, all her affections, become centred.

And as but now we summed up the devout aspirations of the Psalmist in three words—to desire God—to draw near to God—to see God as He is—so, too, the whole earthly occupation of the Christian soul may not inappropriately be thus briefly epitomized—desire of the Eucharist—approaching the Eucharist—union with the Eucharist in life and in death !

Desire of the Eucharist—here is the beginning of her Christian life. To approach the Eucharist—here is the object of all her labours and efforts. Union with the Eucharist in life and in death—here is her joy, perfection, felicity.

To desire the Eucharist—here is the beginning of her Christian life. For the very wish to be a Christian involves the desire of union with Him who is the Author and Finisher of the Faith.*

To approach the Eucharist—here is the object of all her labours and efforts. For, in all her prayers, in all her self-denials, in all her pious practices, what has the devout soul in view but to render herself more worthy of Holy Communion, to prepare herself for receiving it with more fruit, with more frequency?

Lastly. Union with the Eucharist in life and in death—here is her joy, perfection, felicity. And, oh! how can it be otherwise? For to the fervent soul that lives upon the Eucharist, the yoke of the Saviour is ever easy, His burden ever light. Jesus is her Shepherd, how then can she be in want? Her God is with her, how then can she be afraid? Day by day advancing in perfec-

* Heb., xii. 2.

tion under the eye of her Divine Protector, every fresh Communion is to her but another step by which she ascends from virtue to virtue, out of this vale of tears, until she beholds the God of gods in Sion.*

IX.

And so, in conclusion, I may, without scruple, take the words of our Psalm, and, applying them to the Blessed Sacrament of love, thus interpret their interior sense:—

“As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so do I aspire after thee, O divine Eucharist!

“My soul is athirst for Thee, O fount of life! that, issuing from the secret Heart of Jesus crucified, gushest over our altars in many a prolific rill! Oh! would that I were worthy! would that I were pure enough, charitable enough, humble enough, to partake every day of Thy vivific waters! When, ah! when, O Jesus! shall my heart

* Ps., lxxxiii. 8.

turn from the vanities of time, from the delusions of a false world, and fix itself on Thee alone, her hidden God? When shall my life be so engrossed, buried, absorbed in Thine, that it shall no longer be I that live, but Thyself that liveth in me?"

X.

While, however, the Christian pilgrim, thus blest in the certainty of ever finding near at hand the divine object of his adoration, can afford to despise the worldling's heartless question, "Where is thy God?" far be it from him, in his enjoyment of the Eucharistic presence, to become oblivious of heaven, or to cease repeating with David, "When shall I come to appear before the face of God—*Quando veniam et apparebo?*"

Ah, no! The Eucharist teaches the Christian to desire more ardently than ever his unseen God; to sigh after, to long for that revelation of Him which is yet to

come! It sustains him—it recreates him, up to the term of his earthly existence. Then, with his fading vision he gazes a last farewell on the sacred Host, and, receiving it as his divine viaticum, exclaims:—

Jesus, whom for the present veil'd I see,
What I so thirst for, O vouchsafe to me;
That I may see Thy countenance unfolding,
And may be blest thy glory in beholding.

Hymn of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Twelfth Meditation.

MARY AND THE EUCHARIST.

*Sicut lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias.
Sicut malus inter ligna sylvarum, sic dilectus meus
inter filios.*

As the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters.

As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.—CANT., i. 2.

I.

BLESSINGS on that sweet passage of the sacred Canticles just quoted, which, under two such beautiful images, portrays to us the two purest objects of our love—Mary, and the divine Eucharist.

Typified, at the world's beginning, by the terrestrial Paradise, and itself in turn a figure of our Eden above, Holy Church is often mirrored to us in the Scriptures under the similitude of a garden. But in this delicious garden, this fair enclosure, *hortus conclusus*, I discover two objects surpassing all the rest, whose beauty concentrates my gaze, and casts the whole world into

oblivion—the Lily, and the mystic Apple-tree!

Let others, then, intoxicated by the vanities of life, pursue, as they please, its delusive enchantments; for me, having once breathed this lily's delicate perfume, having once tasted of this Paradisaic fruit, what else have I in heaven, and what besides do I desire upon earth?* Mine be the humble, the hidden life; mine be the calm recess of that emerald lawn where the Queen of Flowers lifts her all-graceful head, and the tree of long-lost Eden bends down its boughs of golden fruitage. Between the Lily and the Apple-tree—between Mary and the Eucharist—there let my days glide along, and there also let me die.

True, the world, too—as who can deny?—has its flowers and its fruits—its flowers ravishing to the eye, its fruits tempting to the palate. But then, is it not of these very flowers we read, “To-day they are, and

* Ps., lxxii. 25.

to-morrow are cast into the oven";* and of these very fruits, "what fruit had ye of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" The fairest flowers of the earth, what are they in reality, but artfully concealed thorns? what its most enticing fruits, but acrid berries of the forest? No; there is no flower like Mary; there is no fruit like the Eucharist. That fruit, then, that flower, be the choice of my heart!

But let us endeavour to penetrate more deeply into the hidden meaning of this comparison, at once so profound and so beautiful.

II.

"As the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters!" Wherefore? Because, surely, of her incomparable, her immaculate purity. "Many daughters", we may say, with the sage, "have gathered together riches, but thou,

* Matt., vi. 30.

O Mary ! hast surpassed them all".* Many have followed after Mary in the path of virginity ; many have copied her virtues, with more or less of success ; not one, however, of them all but, with the Psalmist, must confess, " Behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me".† Mary alone is immaculate !—immaculate in her conception, immaculate in her birth, immaculate in her divine maternity, immaculate in her life and in her death !

No wonder, then, that she alone, of all women, merited to hear from archangelic lips, " Hail, full of grace !" for she alone is pre-eminently " the Virgin"—*Missus est Angelus . . . ad Virginem !* No wonder that He who so loves purity and humility, chose her to become His Mother ; for Mary is the lily of the vale, *lilium convallium*. No wonder that death, so terrible to the children of men, should not be able to retain

* Prov., xxxi. 29.

† Ps., i. 7.

her as his prey; for Mary is the root and Queen of that chaste generation, beautiful in glory, that lives triumphant for ever.*

Yes; among all the flowers of Paradise, Mary is the paragon; and lovely as were those lilies of the field that won our Saviour's praise—excelling even Solomon in all his glory†—yet I know of a lily more lovely, more excellent far—the lily of immortality, the lily of Heaven—our Immaculate Lady!

III.

The prophet of the Canticle goes on to say, “As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons”.

Jesus is the world's surpassing and choicest fruit. He is the blessed fruit of Mary's womb; he is, later on, the blood-red fruit of the Cross; He is, lastly, and

* Wisd., iv 2.

† Matt., vi. 28.

above all, our beatific fruit in the most Holy Eucharist.

Rooted in the altar of God, and overshadowing it with its umbrageous foliage, the Eucharist is that Tree, lovely and beloved, of which it is written, "I sat down under his shade whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate".* Here it is that, beneath a depth of solemn twilight, God thrice holy veils the splendour of that glory which we could not behold and live. Here it is that the Light of Light abides, for our sake, in shade and thick obscurity,—an obscurity, however, which, like that in which the Spouse of the Canticles seeks her beloved, invites rather than repels—a shade wholly devoid of gloominess, and breathing nought but peace and divine serenity. O delicious retreat! O odoriferous arbour! O all sacred refuge! When the fire of passion gnaws my heart—when

* Cant., ii. 3.

the world's false glare dazzles my feeble vision, hither let me fly;—here let me repose beneath this branching roof, and feed on the golden fruit that clusters the drooping boughs. For that fruit, the antidote of Eve's, my famished nature pines, conscious that it alone can satisfy its hunger; for the juice of that fruit my heart and my lips yearn, conscious that it alone can exhaust their thirst. Oft as I succeed in obtaining it, so oft I desire it afresh; oft as I gather it afresh, so oft it renews itself again.

O Tree, most prolific, most bountiful! the more I seek thy shade, the more invitingly dost thou woo me to it; the more ardently I yearn for thy gifts, so much the more eager art thou to communicate them. Ever, as I pass by, thou seemest to borrow a voice, and to say, "All ye that hunger or thirst, come unto me". Ever, as thou droppest into my bosom thy divine fruit, I hear a soothing whisper, "My delight is

to be with the children of men". How then, can I but prefer thee above all the trees of the forest?

IV.

Mary and the Eucharist!—the Lily and the mystic Apple-tree!—We have glanced at each separately, but the Prophet of the Canticles, as one cannot fail of observing, blends them both in one; and for what cause? Ah, surely it were reason enough to say, because, in his eye, both are so lovely; but there is another and a deeper reason—the marvellous, the surpassing connection that subsists between them.

The very thought of the Eucharist brings with it the image of Mary; and Mary, in turn, is she not our best instructress in the mysteries, in the love of the Eucharist?

The very thought of the Eucharist brings with it the image of Mary; and oh, how can it be otherwise? That divine flesh, present in the most Holy Sacrament, as our

food and very life—do we not owe it, under God, in the first instance, to Mary? He who, from day to day, is born again and again, so to say, on our altars, at the word of consecration, was born, first of all, and long before, of the Immaculate Mary. His vivific body was moulded from her own veins, and her hands were the first that ever touched it. Mary was the first Priest and the first Communicant! The earliest Christian tabernacle was that lowly manger in which she laid her divine first-born; the earliest altar-linen, the swathing-bands in which she wrapped Him round. How, then, can I approach the Eucharist without thinking of her whose gift it is?

And as we owe the Eucharist to Mary, so, too, none so well as she can teach us to appreciate and love it.

Loking at myself as I am, apart from the delusive gloss of self-love, how feeble, how incapable, do I seem for any supernatural work! With difficulty can I fix my

mind on Jesus, even for a few short minutes. Oft as I endeavour to purify my heart for Him, the stains revive anew. Oft as I address Him in accents of tenderness, the words die away on my lips; oft as I bow down before His Eucharistic presence, some imperfection, some earthliness, intrudes, and conceals Him from me. . . . Thou, O Mary! and thou alone, canst obtain for me that abiding perception, that enduring love of Him, especially as present in His Holy Sacrament, which I so profoundly need. Ah! how can I forget, too, that as it was thy blessed lot to shelter His infancy in thy bosom, so also thou art no stranger to the delights of sacramental union with Him. Day by day, after His ascension into the heavens, I picture thee kneeling before the beloved disciple, and receiving from His hands the divine fruit of thy womb! Oh, then, by those glowing communions, by those sublime acts of infinitely tender love, pray for me, sweet

mother of my God, that I may daily learn to value thy Jesus more and more, in this all-gracious mystery. Thyself and the Eucharist be my joy, my solace, my perpetual delight. Between the lily and the mystic apple-tree—there, with the beloved disciple, be my portion for ever !

V.

But, in conclusion, let me remember that it is the property of love to express itself by more than mere words. If, then, Mary and the Eucharist are, indeed, the peculiar objects of my affection, I must strive to exhibit this love for them in my daily life, and more particularly in the practice of those virtues which find in them their special types.

Would I know what these virtues are? Let me have recourse once more to the inspired figures which have formed the subject of our meditation.

The lily, then, with its snow-white chalice—the mystic apple-tree, with its bountiful produce of golden fruitage—of what virtues are they the respective emblems? The first, surely, is the emblem of purity; the second, of charity.

If I love Mary, I must strive to become pure. If I love the Eucharist, I must strive to imitate its bountifulness, its diffusiveness, its self-abandonment.

I live, O Lord! in the midst of a world which is constantly offending and outraging Thee—in which a thousand impure spectacles attract the gaze; in which evil passions are unceasingly stirred, innocence imperilled—thoughts, affections, desires, drawn astray from Thee, their true end. Here, then, let Mary be my pattern and bright mirror, as she is also my divinely-provided aid. Let me but stamp her image on my heart, and it shall remain pure as the lily among the thorns.

But as Mary gives birth to the God of

the Eucharist, so, too, Christian purity is the prolific principle of an ever active charity at once spiritual and corporal.

Ah, then, I will study to introduce this divine charity into all the actions of the day. My language shall be, as the words of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things;* my alms shall be ever ready for the destitute; my tears, my sympathies, for all who suffer. And as Jesus expends Himself wholly for me in the Eucharist, so will I cheerfully offer myself to spend and be spent for the good of my neighbour.

Heaven grant that, blending thus purity and charity into the tissue of our lives, we may please Him who loves to be among the lilies, and admits no trees into His vineyard but those which bear good fruit. And so may we merit one day to hear from the lips of our Divine Lord: "As the lily

* Rom., x. 15.

among the thorns, as the apple-tree among
the trees of the wood, so are ye unto me,
O my well-beloved, among the children of
men !”

THE END

20 N060

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